

We had something going
Thought *Something going*
twh.sg



A ZEITGEIST OF POST-1994 TRUTHS

As Co-Curators Tlali Taoana, Molemo Moiloa and Thando Sangqu, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who's contributed to this anthology and the overall project.

Thank you:

Zakes Mda	Mpumelelo Macheke	Bean There Coffee
Pumla Dineo Gqola	Sipho Hlongwane	The Feminist Stokvel
Andy Petersen	Rafael Powell	#FeesMustFall Student Leaders
Lebohang 'Nova' Masango	Megan Bryer	Maria McCloy
Sindiso Nyoni	Gabriel Crouse	Lebogang Nkoane
Mack Michael Magagane	Sharon Dell	Ferial Haffajee
Hagen Engler	The Bomb with special mention to [Teboho Mahlatsi and Bongumusa Zungu]	Yolisa Phahle
Thenjiwe Stemela	S'Cur and Cutt	Andiswa Makanda
Sibusisiwe Maseko	Mbuso Ndlovu	Max Barashenkov
Spoek Mathambo	Kabelo Thathe	
Thato Tsotetsi	Jesse Yende	
Pelonomi Moiloa	Reason	

DANKIE



Photography [Mack Michael Magagane]

Our aim was to provide an honest platform for a new generation of young South Africans to share their thoughts and perspectives on their country. The point behind the blog, online magazine and online platform was to collate selective thought pieces and works from young people, and even those who were not so young. The website, "That's How It Is" was shaped by its raw, uncensored commentary on a youthful society. We evolved from "That's How It Is" to THIS, as we no longer needed a long phrase as a title. The abbreviation best expressed our point: THIS is it or Yizo.

THIS was founded and evolved on the basis of a framework to provide a voice to young South Africans in the post-1994 context. Young people feel a strong connection to the globalised and shifting world, now defined by hashtags and trends. THIS allowed and encouraged young, urban contributors to write, and stimulated a healthy discussion on both negative and positive feedback. The contributors to Thought We Had Something Going emerge as the poster children of what analysts would say should define the rainbow nation youth: well-educated, racially integrated and exercising the spoils of their freedom. The writers speak about freedom and their access to rights their forefathers fought for. As you read on you'll understand how the ideas of freedom and rights are contested, with writers speaking about the dilemmas of "having an Ivy-league education" or "a Skhothane love affair". Even though these issues seem trivial on the surface, the writers in

this book speak from a place of honesty. Whilst some of these narratives were written close to three to four years ago, they remain as relevant, if not more so, today. The young writers have created their pieces at different stages in their lives – some are still in high school and varsity, while others are in the infancy of their careers. The writings in this anthology present a tapestry of truth, woven together by a social group that is unashamedly privileged but conscious of its lack of freedom. Each writer in this anthology speaks from a place that reflects on issues that affect South Africa and/or its people. Zara Julius writes about how the "middle class" needs to challenge its liberal thinking. Pelonomi Moiloa tries to understand the "autonomy" of "street kids". Buyani Duma looks at the human condition and his stories confront social truths in a humorous manner that pokes fun at Western ideals, within the Township. Mpumelelo Macheke's "White Girls In Nyanga" is a pertinent piece of writing that points to the difference between being born privileged and being born free, and defines this difference. The visual narrative in this book is captured through the lens of Mack Magagane. Mack has captured candid moments of young South Africans at music festivals, gigs and places of interest. He produced a raw photo series at Oppikoppi in 2013 of friends and fellow campers. As we convoyed our way back from Oppikoppi one of our cars overheated. Mack was able to capture this moment of friends and acquaintances standing together waiting for the journey to begin once again. If we examine Mack's cover image more closely in relation to contemporary South Africa and its people, it seems that our car is still overheating and that smiles are slowly starting to fade.

We've seen the importance of young voices in the Arab Spring, London Riots and more recently with student movements such as #RhodesMustFall. This book gives insight into the psyche of the middle class young South African. The stories, we feel, were produced ahead of their time (between 2009 and 2014) and still present compelling realities today. As each contributor has written and created images that tell of a youth that was raw, honest and truthful, we have chosen not to clean-edit some of the writing or visuals, so as to reflect this sentiment from the contributors.

We believe that storytelling, music with mixes from Spoek Mathambo, OkMalumeKoolkat's Dirty Paraffin outfit, and photography are critical forms to reflect moments before the euphoria of Instagram, Twitter or hashtags. This collection explores a platform that was a zeitgeist of South African youth at the time. As Africa has the biggest youth population

worldwide, this voice becomes more important as it is mobile, connected and engaging in politics, economics and culture. Thought We Had Something Going presents the thoughts and aspirations of young people before "umswenko", "filters" or Snapchats.

This book came about in discussions with one of the contributors of THIS, Molemo Moiloa, who thought the writings should be archived. This book has been over two years in the making and much credit is due to Molemo and her commitment as content editor and co-curator.

I asked Zakes Mda to write the preface for this book as I believed he would provide important insight when looking at inter-generational dynamics. His critique of the book is important as he expresses his fondness for the writing and the subject. His perspective on the book and the issues raised will hopefully lead to an important discussion on the black middle class and their lack of responsibility for what their children are doing. I would like to say, Thank You, Sir, for writing the preface and for posing an important question that I hope our generation will be able to answer.

Lastly, this book or concept has evolved thanks to the guidance of co-curator Tlali Taoana whom I met in October 2014. It has been an emotionally taxing experience with back and forth iMessaging trying to curate this project. I thank you, Tlali, for being the core for this concept. We still don't have any answers as to what it is that we are doing here.

To you, dear reader, as you read our anthropological findings of over five years of research, I hope you'll begin to figure out what you have going, since we won't be 21 forever.

Thando Sangqu

Co-Curator of Thought We Had Something Going

November 2015

PREFACE

When Thando Sangqu approached me out of the blue to write this preface I was reluctant at first. Many people ask me to write prefaces for all sorts of things, just as many others send me their unsolicited manuscripts, expecting me to attend to them pronto. I have learned to turn down such requests: otherwise I would spend all my life reading and commenting on other people's writing instead of attending to my own work. My first instinct, then, was to reject Thando's request. But when he outlined his purpose and objective, I was impressed by his initiative and the clarity of his vision.

This anthology, with its contributions from a number of writers, photographers and artists, he told me, aims to explore how young South Africans confront their truths and their inner political struggles in a quest for relevance. "The book ultimately looks at how, in a society that seeks so much validation in brand and social affiliation, perhaps young people need to learn to be their own greatest assets and favourite brand," he said. "We launch this book in the 21st year of South Africa's democracy as I think it is important that we finally ask the question: Where to from here? We have neglected to confront our truths and perhaps this book is that turning point for South Africa – a chance to wake up by reading the socio-political musings of young people in the infancy of their careers, people who have either just graduated or are about to graduate."

Who could say no to such noble objectives? As soon as I received the manuscript I delved into it with relish and immediately fell in love with its words and images.

These are the stories of young South Africans portraying their world in engaging and frequently lucid prose. They are voices that are seldom heard in our various media, especially in such a collective and pointed form, and coming from a demographic that is often ignored or treated with dismissive disdain but whose impact on social trends is undeniable. Some of the creators of these messages, be they written text or images, self-identify as "born-frees" – the generation of young people who were born after 1994 or grew up in a South Africa newly liberated from the shackles of apartheid even if they were technically born before 1994. But their class location is quite different from that of one famous "born-free" called Malaika wa Azania who has written movingly in her own book about growing up in a shack and being raised by a single mother in conditions of poverty – very much like millions of other "born-frees" whose lives have not been improved by the advent of democracy. One

of the writers in this collection describes himself as "a poster child for black economic achievement ☐ and member of the so-called Born Free generation". He and his co-authors write facily about sharing an apartment in Clifton, about attending expensive private high schools, and about club-hopping and encounters with bouncers. In the same breath they decry the combination of money and ego, and the sense of naivety and entitlement that develops in young people of their social and economic standing.

Obviously the "born-free" label as an identity for this generation is used by these writers with a tinge of irony, much as Malaika used it only to problematise it and in order to reject the whole notion. One can read between the lines in some of the stories that in fact none of them is free, despite being born into privilege. As long as they continue to view from the balconies of their bachelor pads, as one story suggests, emaciated children who have made the pavements and sidewalks of the city their home, the fact that they (the writers) were born into "black economic achievement" becomes a glaring contradiction. Some reflect the realisation that political independence did not necessarily translate into freedom for the vast majority of their compatriots. Others have to deal with middle-class guilt at the plight of the street children and others less privileged.

Of course, not all the stories are geared towards political statements. Some are social commentary while others are entertainment for its own sake. They portray in vivid terms how "the other half lives" – except it is not a half but a tiny minority.

Many of the pieces are compelling not only because of their content but the flair with which they have been executed. They are written with the brashness and freshness of youth. Some writers say what they want to say, ignoring the niceties of conventional form and style, inventing their own in the process.

For me as a fiction writer what makes a lot of these stories even more engaging is that though most of them narrate real-life events, in other words they are non-fiction, the writers have used the tools of fiction quite effectively. They therefore transcend mere reportage to delve deeper into nuanced characterisation. Instead of answering the journalist's question: "What happened?" they answer the fiction writer's question: "What was it really like to be in what happened?" And they do that with panache and sometimes humour.

Young people of whatever social class are about rebellion. We see that in this collection too. There is, for instance, rebellion against

some of the norms and values that are imposed on them by virtue of being members of the black middle class. Middle-class angst, you may call it. The writers rebel against the self-hate that is evident in valorising English, irrespective of unintelligent content, at the expense of indigenous languages. Many of these writers suffer from the alienation that results from receiving all their education in so-called multi-racial private schools and those referred to as "Model C" – schools that privilege English over all other languages. Some are even first-language English speakers as they were brought up in that language, hence the rebellion.

Some of the rebellion is against classism in the consumption of popular culture, and the lionisation of Americanisms as the "pinnacle of modern culture", as one writer puts it, while in some instances embracing them, and adopting and adapting some of their elements. There is also rebellion against liberalism which is characterised as boring, conceited and deceitful.

Sometimes a writer reflects on the meaning of freedom in post-1994 South Africa. It is telling that these writers talk of a "post-'94 South Africa" rather than "post-apartheid". The legacy of apartheid is still very strong in today's South Africa. In some instances it is not just the legacy but the practices and the economic arrangements of the past that still pertain – including what one of the writers refers to as "apartheid constructed geographies".

This collection of writing will take you on journeys of self-examination, self-criticism and self-discovery. You will find in this trove interesting analyses of inter-racial and sexual relationships, and of deeply embedded attitudes, biases and prejudices that manifest themselves only when friendships are tested. You will discover the different ways racism manifests itself among peers. You will marvel at how some of them problematise race. Issues of racial – and of ethnic and class – identity are faced head-on, with a new freshness for South Africans who are used to the black-and-white binary devoid of complexity. However, I have no idea whether the writers' use of the demeaning word "tribe" (instead of the more politically correct "ethnic group") is ironic or a result of an education system that has deprived young South Africans of critical awareness. "Tribe" belongs in the dustbin of history together with words like "witchdoctor". It is an invention of Western anthropologists in the first instance, but is even more ridiculous when used for people who have long been detribalised – even according to the very definitions of the said anthropologists. It is fine to use the term for those folks who refer to themselves thus and whose societies operate in a tribal context

in their reservations, such as the Native Americans.

The images enrich the book. Like most of the writing, the creators of this art are stirred by love and other related passions. The subjects of the photographs are as interesting as the artistry of the photographers. It is a whole parade of fascinating street fashions. They range from fem-boyish – what the fashion industry is doing currently, taking masculine clothing and making it wearable for women – to gas masks as fashion; as some fans would say, "We wear these masks so we don't breathe your bullshit". There are a lot of Americanised African trends here too, some quite "gangsta" and "thug" (these are terms of endearment, by the way), and others even "tribal" – using this now as fashion industry terminology. All these images make statements that enhance the stories.

All in all, this is a worthwhile project, and I am glad Thando was successful in twisting my arm. He, as the compiler and driving force of this collection, has done a great job and deserves accolades.

My final question: What do these writers and photographers view as their responsibility to South Africa and to humanity? Read on and see if this book will provide us with the answer.

Zakes Mda, MA, MFA (Ohio), PhD (Cape Town),
Professor of Creative Writing,
English Department,
Ohio University,
USA



 **Thought** *We had* **Something** *going* 
Some **going**
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WHEN *the* GOING
gets
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WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET HIGH

Thato Tsotetsi

I did it to forget. I have tried everything to forget but still it haunts me. You see when I take that sniff, the rush doesn't hit all at the same time. It takes my mind to heights only real in my dreams: the feeling that nothing matters and the world is at my feet, for the taking.

It's the lows that I hate, though. Having to sit in the office with my nose runny.

"It's just my sinuses acting up," I tell Sarah-Jane, my colleague who comments that I might be coming down with a cold. She tells me I look pale.

"I feel fantastic," I tell her as I grind my teeth. I need gum. That should distract everyone from my clenching jaw, signs that the three-day high is coming down. I look at my phone to see if Les has replied to my BBM. Nothing. He needs to get here soon so I can feed my habit again.

This was me six months ago and in retrospect I have no idea who that person was. I'm still recovering, financially at least, from the white dragon that sought to consume me.

The shittiest thing about it is the denial – so blatant that I would even lie to Jesus in his face about what I really spent my Sundays doing.

I can't really tell you how or where it began. I mean, I consider myself a smart enough guy and I knew all the risks going into it. I live in a country where the health report for 2007 showed a steady increase in narcotics usage among people aged between 16 and 35 to about 35%. Gender violence, petty crimes and accidents alike are caused by some abuse or other of drugs and alcohol.

Having grown up in a house with an alcoholic father who used to beat my mother, I really don't know where my vow to never drink went.

Having a brother who was hospitalised, kicked out of school and sent to prison for actions induced by drug abuse, I should have known better, right?

Well, I guess what people don't quite get is how subtle the allure actually is. You see, I have always been of the impression that the only people that do such could be found on street corners, looking decrepit and every bit as suspect as any criminal. The same people I would turn up my nose at in the township while growing up.

It was a Friday night and I was in Melville by myself to celebrate having gotten a bonus at work, something that was rare in the current economic climate. Shit, I had done pretty well. Drinking was not new to me. Ten Voodoo vodkas and a couple of tequilas had me swimming between euphoria and downright stupidity.

Brandon, a guy I had had a crush on for longer than I cared to remember, walked in looking fly as usual. He waved from across the room and joined me at my table. I didn't know it then, but it was just a ploy to get drunk without any money. That sort of thing is pretty common in these parts. He looked at me with the promise of a wild night

which, after eight months of being single and sex-less, was obviously appealing. We downed shooters, and beers as if the SAB had announced it was closing down. He suggested we head to Stones on Main Street. I had nothing to do and I was looking to get fucked so I obliged him. In the cab on the way there he said something about having to call Coolies, a local dealer. At the time I was well known for my spendthrift ways, so his assumption that money would not be an issue was spot-on. In the doorway of Stones he asked me if I'd ever done coke. I hesitated in my head but replied, "Yeah," rather carelessly. What he didn't know was that I hated the shit. An ex had stolen from me to get high, so, no. I wasn't keen.

Coolies came through and they made the exchange. I'd parted with R300, but then I had thousands more in my account so it wasn't a big deal. We were now on the balcony with four other guys who seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. Les was one of them.

I was in a drunken haze and as I knelt in between Les's legs to shield myself from onlookers, I noticed a sign hanging mockingly on one of the pillars: "The intake of narcotics shall not be tolerated at this establishment."

I closed my eyes, one finger blocking my left nostril, and sucked the powdery substance up my right nostril through a rolled up R20 note. "Take another hit to balance it out," said Les in his raspy voice. This didn't make sense to me, so Brandon nudged me, indicating that I should use my other nostril to sniff. We took turns and repeated this exercise about three or four times at Stones. I felt nothing but sober. Everything was vivid and my speech had gone up several decibels. I didn't know it then, but I was high. I wanted more.

We all decided to head to Les's place in Westdene. It was a one-bedroom apartment in a secure complex. It didn't occur to me then, but the furniture was very sparse, consisting of one armchair and a mattress on the living room floor. We all took turns to head to the bedroom: I think we'd gone through about eight grams at this point. Zandile was hitting on me. She was a Xhosa girl with a bad weave and chipped fingernails. No one had told her I was gay but I think she knew. She just didn't really care. The others were egging this on and I was feeling fearless with all the opium in my system. We kissed in the bathroom and somewhere between closing the blinds to block the sunlight from my eyes and locking the door, my hands were fiddling with her dripping labia.

It took about three days to clear my bank account of about R4,000 – unaccounted for: at least, not with anything tangible. I found myself going to the oddest places in Johannesburg: Hillbrow where I met Candy who I'm told has since gone back to Durban to start studying towards her degree; Marshalltown in downtown Johannesburg where I met Sims who I'm told is still struggling to make ends meet between photography and DJ-ing for the Gutta Institute; Rosebank where I met Idris, a Muslim rent boy, who I'm told still sells tricks to pay rent and is still an aspiring model.

I went from being one of the top performers at work to the guy everyone tip-toes around because my temper was shorter than Julius Malema's. I'd basically fucked up, missing rent twice. I had to sleep at a friend's house because my landlord locked me out but I was still living it up. I don't know how I avoided being axed from work when Jason was caught schnuffing in the bathroom, since I was in there five minutes before him.

You see, when it is hot niggers like Brandon that offer you your first hit, it's your dick that does that thinking. And when you do have your first hit and end up screwing a woman instead of Brandon, who is in the room being fucked by Coolies because he still owes thousands for coke bought on credit, you don't think.

The bravado, the machismo that comes with this stupid habit is enough to send anyone spiralling out of control. It was when my cousin sat me down and pointed out the facts while my head was pounding and my nostrils were itching for another hit that I realised it had to stop. Going for three days at a time with no sleep is not a joke. This is how you end up throwing a coffee mug at your boss because the cunt asked you to redo the monthly report for the third time.

I was the man, but I was broke.

Kids, drugs will kill you.

You see, when you toe the line between a boring existence and having jack to write about, you seek stimulus from the dumbest shit. That's what I did. It's inexcusable.

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CADENCES OF FREEDOM

CADENCES OF FREEDOM

Thenjiwe Stemela

Six teacups and one wine glass, all stained with faded pink half-moons, clinked a tune, a reminder of the so-called freedom of her twenties. An express turn towards the microwave where a fresh coat of grenadine was applied averted the whiff of a truth curdling at the bottom of the sink. And out she hurried to the corner Pick n Pay, bounding over the saliva-woven webs of unwanted attention to grab so-called supplies.

Ghostly, the muted tune took up temporary residence on her lips as she stood in aisle seven, stuck, mouthing a personal debate between the merits of either pino or a cab-sauv-shiraz. Then back she came past the stares of panting forty-somethings offering to pay for her red – pino, definitely – at the till. Lashes batted a “no” thick with attitude. Still, as she turned to leave, several gods were thanked for the sight, receding with a clink of boots, which took in their stride the debris of hearts and egos.

In the park, a toothless woman with a baby on her hip yelled, “jou fokken naai,” at her as she shrugged off a request for a “too rend.” There again, the tune, a little messy now. She kept on, set in a familiar direction. Turned a corner, and then on further towards a door in a building, to see a so-called friend, a durex box in her handbag, hoping she wasn’t too late.

At fourteen she had penned a future romance with a man of music and words. It would be a perpetual weekend. Formalities of titles or declarations were absent. What they wanted of each other would be taken and given; every transaction making each of them more beautiful. And when it was done, it would be done.

Here, she’d imagined for herself a freedom from the scenes of single women in pyjamas voicing, over a tub of gelato, their agonies with men. Of teen girls falling statistic to pregnancy and STDs, playing scapegoats for society’s ills. Or, of happy endings sealed with diamonds and a suited someone with a calculator in his pocket. And if you listened carefully, buzzing in the background of these scenarios, so too as she wrote, the tune of getting fucked composed itself steadily.

Freedom. The state of being which begot our wildest dreams and, in the same imagining, made victim and prey of us in the course of the desires of others. The short sight of a teenage recipe for freedom of passion, body and the proverbial heart may not have seen for the other, his or her freedom in its most realised, grotesque form: “I take what I want.” The perpetual weekend for one is just a regular Saturday for another: a dance in pursuit of les petites morts to that tune characterised by a dyad of ecstasy and despair.

Curious it is now, for her to realise the trick of freedom at 22 and lie in wait in the cruel shade of the versed dream... Much like our nation, waiting in the company of whispers of raped women and the goading of short skirts/kangas/showers/children barely a year old wrapped in blankets, so soft they’d melt in the sun, being too provocative/on a bus/too lesbian/of main and side chicks and any other allusions to women as dishes/of fear to walk in the street alone/fears of being alone with or without ring on finger/of gold diggers and poor women and prostitutes who deserve their domestic terrors because they had not the balls to leave/of pro-birthers, not pro-lifers who’ll beseech you to keep the baby and then forget you at first feeding/of tea cups thrown by husband at wife looked at suggestively by stranger on the bus in an alley at school on the train at home over there and there and there/to plead to be emancipated from what they had made (or unmade) her in their minds, their secret places.

Her missions towards little deaths with so much fervour as to leave seven dirty dishes for another day amplified, as she returned, unopened bottle in hand, one notion. Both she and so-called friend had got what they were after, but she, not entirely what she wanted. A crazy dance it was, with the best and the worst of herself, to a stinging tune.

This is a refrain: hypnotic. A dull throbbing against a nightly silence. The sound of rage sprung of a horror to which you pleaded, “Yes, yes...” as he squeezed your skin ‘til it stung. And then, once he was done, grabbed his keys before you could dress.

It is the tune that carried you to a man you may have conjured blindly in a teenage diary? A spell lacking in content and a four-letter word beginning with the letter “L.” It’s the tune that meets you back home, with only the downturned faces of sunflowers for welcome and a lyric pinned to the wall by the edge of a blade – that quiet, quiet rage. The smell of old milk in the kitchen to be tended to by no one else but you. When you felt unclean today and couldn’t say why you couldn’t shake it off. And you wondered just who the hell authored the scratch in the record to bring you here again, staring at the ceiling, blue-sing to this tune. Still, in your mind you have playing on repeat the eyes of one boy with the stare that turned your pack of McDonald’s fries into a meal. The kiss that made your lips hurt, and the “goodnight” that stripped the evening of all trick and affirmed this, if only for a moment: there was a girl who liked a boy, a boy who liked a girl. If you could have this, it would be all there would be. And then the tune. You understood freedom fully when you didn’t get what you want.

It hurts here most. At the beginning. A freedom misfired.



WHITE GIRLS IN NYANGA

HASHTAG #WHITEGIRLSINNYANGA: AN ANECDOTAL REFLECTION ON RACIAL AFFINITY & RACIAL IDENTITY IN A POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Mpumelelo Macheke

31st December 2013
Dear Diary

I am in Cape Town, as planned. I am currently staring through the lounge window, overlooking the waves of the Atlantic as they collide with the shore rock, awaiting the ostentatious display of fireworks that traditionally ushers in the New Year. I arrived a few days ago with Jennifer and Khanyi – with whom I am sharing an all-expenses-paid apartment in Clifton. I have not been in Cape Town for three years, so it was great to make my comeback with Jennifer and Khanyi – at the age of eighteen, when no one was going to ask us questions about our nights of debauchery, our afternoon feedings to heal the hangovers and our ever-depleting bank balances.

My school’s private examinations’ board released our matric results on the evening of the 29th. Khanyi matriculated with summa cum laude while I walked away with five distinctions. As for Jennifer, well, Jennifer got a bachelor degree pass at least. We all decided to celebrate our academic achievements by ambitiously planning to visit every club on Long Street that night, which we did. We wanted to celebrate our youth. A reckless manner of celebration that would only enhance our feelings of invincibility was on the cards. We had the money. We had the egos. We also had a profound and potent sense of naivety in addition.

Dear Diary, allow me to explain to you the occurrences of the 29th of December.

It was 23:50
We were reeking of debauchery. Jennifer, Khanyi and I club-hopped every spot from beer bars to hipster lounges, buying bottles of this and shots of that, while dancing the whole way through. We entered the final bar that quickly stole our affection and became our favourite venue out

of all the places we had visited. Not only were the bouncers kind, the bar also had cheap beverages and designated tables to dance upon – the latter being a life-long fantasy of mine. I headed straight for what seemed to be the last open table and mindlessly climbed onto it. Once I had my two feet planted firmly on the table top, overlooking the small wave of spectators who were waiting for what I was going to do next – me being the only male to occupy what seemed to be an arena dominated by females – I knew it was time to perform.

I mutated into my Queen of the Night persona. I choreographically ripped off my jacket and threw it into the crowd before I glanced to the DJ behind me, giving him a mischievous wink. The pulsating snare beat of Beyonc ’s hit “Diva” came shooting out of the speakers. The DJ understood my intention. Thank you, Mister DJ. I put eight years of professional dance and musical studies to use. My knowledge and love for the song that was playing enabled me to manipulate every beat and lyric, transforming the old tradition of dancing carelessly on bar tables into some sort of art form. I worked my abdomen, gyrated my hips, stomped my feet and swayed my arms about. The crowd had forgotten about the three girls who occupied the other tables. Everyone was singing my praises. Even Khanyi, Jennifer and her boyfriend Brad were cheerleading me on in the corner – well, not so much Brad. I snapped my fingers, swung my imaginary Peruvian weave, broke my backi and vogued for my life!

The crowd’s roars of admiration were life-giving. Next thing I knew, intrigued men were offering me shots of appreciation, while their girlfriends stood in vain. In fact, I would have thought that the admiration would have come in the form of screams from women rather than the raucous roars of men. It was interesting to me how these men were so enticed by this flamboyant little suburban homosexual who could dance better than most of their girlfriends. Indeed, I was at the epicentre of a newfound affection. I was intoxicated with glory.

I decided to step down from my 2m^2 pedestal for a restroom break and a breath of fresh air on the balcony. Upon exiting the compacted restroom I caught up with Khanyi who grabbed me by the arm and jokingly commented on how much havoc I wreak when my Queen of the Night persona takes over, as she led me outside to the balcony where Jennifer and Brad were smoking.

“There’s my fucking superstar!” Jennifer screeched as she stretched her arms out to hug me. Brad awkwardly focused his eyes on the cork of a wine bottle his feet were playing with when it was quasi-expected of him to offer some sort of commentary on my spectacular performance. Brad had never quite taken a liking to me but the feeling was mutual. The most we had ever said to each other were meagre greetings. I guess it is a common phenomenon for one’s boyfriend to have a disliking for his girlfriend’s gay best friend. I had no reason to interact with him at the time. He was Jennifer’s mess and not mine, thankfully.

00:30
Khanyi, Jennifer, Brad and I stood on the balcony of the Irish-inspired bar, frivolously reminiscing about our year. To everyone’s displeasure, Khanyi coaxed us into discussing the intricacies of what it meant to be the poster-children for a multicultural and non-racial society by introducing a conversation revolving around living a responsible life as tertiary students. Party-pooing Khanyi – the least intoxicated out of us all – forcibly persisted in her arguments about our responsibilities as the “born-free generation” of this country. Khanyi, the first black student to matriculate summa cum laude in the history of her school – was about to make a painful advancement in her academic argument about our duties to this country, when I heard another booty-shaking song my Queen of the Night persona could not resist. The DJ saved me. Without indication or warning, I ran back into the bar, leaping onto my vacant pedestal of glory, just in time for the first verse of a song I knew rather intimately. The crowd was relieved to see me again. As I continued to woo and wow, the brims of the shot glasses overflowed, attention from the males increased, while the female jealousy multiplied. The Queen of the Night was completely in her element. Monde Maseko was a distant memory.

The DJ played all the R&B hits that black girls go weak at the knees over. However, he could not cater solely for me any longer and decided to play other genres the Queen of the Night was not too familiar with. I got down from my stage and decided to look for my girlfriends. I headed to the balcony but did not find them. I paced the length of the bar four times, touching each wall twice. Still no sight of Khanyi, Jennifer, or her boyfriend. The bar was small enough to locate people easily. I decided to try the balcony one last time, to no avail. I was puzzled. I began to question whether or not my search was being compromised by my level

of intoxication, but I quickly dismissed that suspicion on the silly grounds that I could still walk in a straight line and hadn’t forgotten about my sober and true self, Monde Maseko. I paced the bar one last time, touching each wall again, yet I still could not find them. I made my way towards the exit, explaining to the bouncer that I would be right back as I passed him. He nodded, and opened the door for me. Long Street’s sidewalks were teeming with all kinds of people and activity: the young and reckless, as well as the old and traumatised. Some were throwing up on the side of the street while others let go of their inhibitions and made out with each other in corners. I ignored the chaos and proceeded to reach for my phone, moving my head in all directions to ensure that no one could fulfil any intentions of having their way with my belongings. Still keeping a wary eye on my surroundings, I scrolled through my phone book, looking for Khanyi’s number. I found it and I dialled, pressing the phone firmly against my ear, still glancing around me. It rang with no answer. I dialled Jennifer’s number, holding my phone firmly against my ear again, yet her line went straight to voicemail.

At that moment, something within me began dismantle itself. I attempted both their numbers twice after the first attempt. Khanyi’s phone had gone straight to voicemail by the third attempt which was peculiar, seeing as her phone was ringing just two attempts ago. Did her battery run flat? Was she ignoring me? Was she in a compromised position? Was the ringing of her phone putting her in some sort of danger? My stomach turned as the questions threw themselves at me, mercilessly. I knew something was seriously peculiar about that evening when I found myself in a situation where I felt I needed to communicate with Brad. But I did not have his number. Something in me continued to fall apart, but I returned to the bar – to my vacant 2m^2 stage to be precise – because it was the closest thing to a familiar and comfortable reality.

01:50
Something was gnawing at my conscience, luring me closer and closer to sobriety. I was slowly losing momentum in my dancing. My body became less flexible. Dancing suggestively on the tables for male amusement and female jealousy grew less entertaining for my intoxicated self. I turned down free tequila shots offered by amused men when their girlfriends were not looking. Beyonc ’s “Diva” was playing for the second time, only this time it sounded far from the ego-evoking hit that I loved and

more like a poorly synthesised attempt at redefining R&B. My debauched cosmos was being infiltrated by a threatening and unwanted feeling of concern. I felt less like my alcoholic Queen of the Night persona and more like my too-clever-of-a-homosexual-to-be-dancing-on-them-tables self, Monde Maseko.

The bottom line was that I had lost contact with my girlfriends for the first time on this trip. My phone calls to both of them were not going through, which made me absolutely sober with worry as I halted a meter taxi on Long Street. Returning to the apartment was the logical thing to do. I thought about the impossibility of Khanyi or Jennifer returning to the apartment before I did, just to offer myself some sort of peace of mind. I had assumed the responsibility of keeping the last set of keys to the apartment. Jennifer left her set at Brad's place. Brad had refused to return them in a feeble effort to get Jennifer to eventually come stay with him. Khanyi and I perceived her boyfriend's behaviour as possessive but Jennifer seemed to think of it as Brad's unique way of courting her. Khanyi had dropped her keys in the sewer that morning, by virtue of misfortune, I guess.

If Khanyi returned home to find that I wasn't at the apartment, my absence would send her into an immediate panic. She'd place her hands firmly on her head, pace the street for a few minutes while continuously whispering, "Oh my God!" then make a phone call to the police, attempting to prematurely open a missing person's docket before even thinking about contacting me. Khanyi was more like a cute and clumsy academic than a stern daughter of logic. If Jennifer, on the other hand, returned to the apartment before I did, she would probably seek lavish refuge at Brad's place in Camps Bay, which is what he would've wanted anyway. The cab driver delivered me in front of the gate and I paid the negotiated fee – which was R30 less than what the meter was reflecting.

02:02

I unlocked the door to the apartment, thinking about the hopeless possibility of finding both of them sitting on the couch – disappointed, but safe. Yet, how was that going to be possible if neither had their keys? I opened the door to be greeted by an empty couch and the rest of the apartment, which was just as empty. Inevitable. I grabbed the last Red Bull from the fridge to keep me awake. I attempted calling both of them once more, to no avail. I had no indication or clue when either Khanyi or Jennifer would make an appearance.

07:05

I was woken up by my phone.

"Argh, dammit!" I swore as I opened my eyes, realising I had fallen asleep on the couch without closing the curtains of the living room. The sun permeated the room with its brightest beam. My eyes struggled to adjust. At first, everything looked as though it was glowing and glistening, as though Jesus himself had given our living room a spring clean. I had missed the call by the time I reached my cell phone. I pressed a few buttons to reveal who had called. Khanyi. Before I could call her back, the apartment's intercom gave an intrusive ring.

"Hello?" I groaned.

"Hey. It's Khanyi. Please open up."

I tried to assess the tone of her voice to give me a possible indication of what kind of night she had had without me. Not a hint of exhaustion in her voice. She sounded quite normal, as though she had never set foot out of the apartment last night. My apathy graduated to a level of deep displeasure. She arrived at the door and knocked. I immaturely contemplated making her wait until she knocked a second time – perhaps, even a third time – but I decided against it. I opened the door. She said, "Hi, Monde," as she walked in. She did not even look me in the eye. She headed straight for the couch on which I had fallen asleep and sat on its edge. She still would not look me in the face. Instead, she glided her head towards the direction of the window, overlooking the Atlantic waters as they crashed on Clifton's rocky shore. She stared outside for a while. She was quiet. She was not the resplendent Khanyi I was expecting to silence my displeasure with a kiss on the cheek and a, "Sorry for cutting the Queen of the Night's evening short, but do I have news for you, girl!" and proceed to tell me all about her serendipitous adventures of being out on the town on her own for the very first time without Jennifer and me. She just sat there, staring out the window overlooking the sea. She began to sway from side to side as though guiding an infant to sleep. The concern that had popped my bubble of debauchery the previous night returned in that moment. Towards her, I took two timid steps. She appeared unusually clean, considering we were absorbed in alcoholic euphoria the last time we had seen each other. Her shoelaces were tied and her oversized T-shirt tucked neatly into her vintage denim shorts. Her braids had been wrapped neatly into her headscarf before being bundled into a bun resting at the top of her head – not a single braid out of place.

Her blouse, which she had worn the previous night, was the only item of clothing missing. I remembered it because I had harshly advised her to buy it on one of our shopping excursions for our trip to Cape Town. Khanyi cushioned her arms into her abdomen, forced her legs together as though she was carrying something very hot between them or was absolutely desperate for the bathroom. It was as though she was trying to physically reduce, diminish or cave herself in.

"Khanyi?" I enquired. She said nothing in response. She shivered and continued to force her legs together while embracing herself furiously.

"Khanyi?" I repeated, with a layer of deliberate concern in my voice.

She continued her fidgeting, only her swaying became more erratic and arrhythmic. I was bewildered. Khanyi's behaviour was reminiscent of Karabo Moroka when she miscarried Sibusiso Dlomo's child (God, Sis' Karabo lost her mind back then). She was so far gone from the sweet, rational, yet clumsy Khanyi I knew her to be and perhaps the Khanyi she knew herself. She crouched her arms deeper and deeper into her abdomen while struggling to amalgamate her legs into one, disturbing the stable rhythm of her almost-psychotic swaying. She was a body of progressive twitches and impulses, possessed by whatever it was she was trying so hard to hide from reality, until she just stopped moving altogether. At that point, I was mortified. She sat silently and catatonically on that couch. She maintained a horrific stillness, as though an exorcistic scream was to follow. I was contemplating calling the police or bolting out the door, before she gave me the most sincere sign of life: her eyes began to brim with tears. I abandoned my contemplation and ran towards her instead. I sat down beside her. I embraced her. Her body, hard as rock, melted into life in my arms. She gave in to me. I could feel her surrender. All she could do was weep. "I fucked up, Monde. I fucked up so bad!" She broke into voice eventually as her tearful upheaval receded.

"We're going to talk about this. Don't worry, baby. Tell me everything and we'll fix it," I reassured her, still slumped in my arms.

I made her a cup of sweetened Earl Grey tea to get her into a comfortable space where she could relay to me the reason for her sorrow. She took a miniature sip to assess the temperature, then another to assess whether or not the sugar content was appropriate. Satisfied with both, she then took a long sip of the tea, followed by a prolonged sigh of melancholic relief. "Ready to talk?" I asked.

"Monde, I fucked up. Where do I even begin?"

"At the beginning," I replied with cheek. She giggled, which comforted me. "You can go from when you first realised you couldn't find Jennifer or me. That would be a great place to start," I continued. She placed her tea cup on the floor.

"I remember last night very clearly so you don't have to worry about piecing things together. The last time I saw you was outside the bar. I remember this, because Jennifer and Brad were having a smoke and you had just gotten down from dancing on the tables."

God, I don't even remember that part of the night. Thank God Khanyi is not much of a drinker, I thought to myself.

"You went back inside the bar because the DJ was playing some booty-shaking song I knew you could not resist."

I blushed (even though my melanin could not show it).

"I was left with Jennifer and Brad. Then, some guy who was grinding up on me in the bar came outside and came to chill with us," Khanyi continued. His picture surfaced almost immediately in my memory. His height was memorable. He was probably the tallest man in that bar.

"That really tall white dude?" I asked.

"That's the one," she replied. "He came outside with four shots on a tray. Two for me and two for him. In hindsight, I realise that was pretty forward of him but at the time, I thought he was just being really nice, so I accepted. Jennifer said she wanted to give me a private moment with the guy, so she and Brad went back into the bar. We drank our shots and continued to have conversations about his studies, his family and stuff."

"And you trusted him because of what he was telling you?"

"Monde, here is this guy who buys me alcohol and tells me his life's story. Of course I believed him. I believed even more because he wasn't even that tipsy. I thought he was different," Khanyi said defensively.

Her reasoning for investing her trust in this new acquaintance sounded like a serendipitous excuse or a cover-up. It sounded like something Jennifer would offer as legitimate justification, not Khanyi.

"Khanyi" (I gave a surrendering sigh) Okay, go on."

"Then he invited me over to his place. It's not far from our apartment, which gave me all the reason to go with him. So we caught a cab and left "

" And then?"

"He was already enticing me with the idea of sex when we were in the

cab on our way to his place and I was interested. He said he was a virgin awaiting marriage but he said there was something about me that made it worth changing his plans. I know better now, but at the time, that made me feel so special,” Khanyi explained as her eyes began to water. “We went to his apartment and we were already all over each other in the elevator. He was half naked by the time we got to the door. We got into his place and he laid me on the couch and all of a sudden, he became so strong. He tore my blouse open and ripped my shorts off along with my panties. Fucking animal, I swear. But at the time, I guess I was into it,” she explained. I could already see what was coming. “After he took off his pants, he just lay himself on me. He had already penetrated me. Just like that. I really wanted to ask about a condom, but at the time, I thought it would be awkward if I asked him to “you know” ‘unpenetrate’ me and look for a condom,” Khanyi mumbled, choking with regret.

“So I kept quiet, taking his word for it, while he took me for a ride. But the whole thing wasn’t sincere, friend. Something about the way he had his way with me let me know that he was no newcomer to fucking, like he said he was. It hurt so badly. I tried to tell him about the pain, but I don’t think he was listening. I wanted him to withdraw, but before I knew it, he was groaning and growling and the fucking stopped. He did what I ultimately didn’t want him to do. I just went cold, Monde.” The anger in Khanyi’s voice began to emerge. Swearing was rarely part of Khanyi’s choice of expressions. I knew she was in deep distress. “I didn’t want it to be this way. This is not how I was raised. My virginity was taken by a liar, Monde. My virginity was taken so insincerely, Monde. I could be pregnant, I could have an STD! I’ve always known better, but now, now it’s like I have no fucking clue! Not a fucking clue! Not a …” Khanyi fell into my arms again and began to cry again. “He was nice enough to offer me a shower, which I felt thankful for in some twisted way. I felt incredibly dirty, friend. Inside and out. You’re probably wondering why I look so clean in the first place,” Khanyi elaborated, recovering from her tearful episode. I could not believe such a thing would happen to Khanyi, but it did. The sinister realities I constantly hear about on television, radio and read in news articles was my reality because it was Khanyi’s reality. What I shamed and pitied from afar was now so close to me, I was touching it. That devastated me. I wanted to cry for Khanyi. I also wanted to cry with

her.

08:24
My cell phone rang as Khanyi and I were locked in each other’s arms, sharing an Oprah moment. I stood up to answer it as it rang continuously on the kitchen counter. An unrecognisable number appeared on my screen, but I answered it. “Monde! Mo-o-onde!” cried the strangled voice of what sounded like a scared, white girl on the other side of the line. I couldn’t recognise the voice. It did not occur to me at that moment that Jennifer was the missing piece to this puzzle. “Hello? You’re breaking up!” I replied, instead of enquiring who I was speaking to. She sounded like she was in deep trouble and I did not want to come across as insensitive. “It’s Jennifer, Monde, ple-ease help meh-me! Come right now. Co-o-me quickly! Je-esuus, please!” Jennifer wailed louder than Khanyi. I was shocked at the fact that I had disregarded Jennifer, but I stifled that thought because Jennifer sounded like she was in dire need of a hero. “Jennifer, calm down. Tell me where you are. Khanyi and I will come right away.” Jennifer was in an uncontrollable trance of upheavals. I could not get a complete word out of her.

“I-I-I-am-in-in- (bellows out a wail) -I-am” Jennifer struggled on. At that point, a surge of irritation and frustration rippled through me. She needed me and yet could not tell me where she was. She was crying that awful cry I only hear white people cry. The kind of hyperventilating sobbing that is usually triggered by a very traumatic occurrence in a white person’s life, like a bee-sting or a break-up. Well, stereotypically so, at least. “Jennifer, stop your asthmatic nonsense! I can’t hear you! Just tell me where the hell you are!” I demanded. “I-I-I-am-in-Nyanga. Nyanga-a-a-Town-ship. On Mo-mo-letsa-ne Cressent-by-the-the-park,” she struggled on. “We’re on our way!” I responded, not even giving myself the opportunity to fully acknowledge how bizarre it was that Jennifer had landed up in Nyanga.

“Wait Mo-o-nde. Pl-please-let-Brad-know as-weh-well. Please” Her request sounded very childish to me. Well, at least I interpreted it that way. I really struggled to understand why she needed Brad’s involvement in this mess. I did not care in that moment that Brad was her boyfriend. The last time we were all together last night, Brad was

with Jennifer and now it seemed he had no clue what was going on with his girlfriend. But just like my shock at forgetting to remember that Jennifer was missing, I had to stifle my opinion of Brad too, in order to get to Jennifer as soon as I could. I called Brad from Khanyi’s cell phone, only to inform him about what had happened to his girlfriend. He reacted proactively, to my surprise. He offered to pick us up from our apartment and proceed to Nyanga Township to rescue Jennifer. I did not expect that from Brad. In fact, I imagined him prepared to sip on multiple glasses of Mo t in his jacuzzi, expecting a call or a text from Jennifer informing him when she had reached some sort of safety. I could not decide what to make of his intrepid attitude. Perhaps he was not such a lousy companion for Jennifer, after all? Perhaps he was doing it because he was aware of my scrutinising eye? Either way, I could not spend time speculating about the legitimacy of Brad’s intentions.

08:59
“I just don’t get how she landed up in What’s that damn place called, again?” Brad complained as he on-ramped onto the NI highway. “Nyanga” I responded stoically. “Yah, bru.iii Fuck!” He spat. It was almost as though he was having that conversation with himself. I could have mentioned the name of any other place and he would have agreed, as long as the name of that place sounded like nothing he was used to pronouncing. Brad was just a broken record of careless and reckless complaints. He swore aloud while he murmured suspicious comments under his breath.

“Fuck it, man! Fuck this whole situation, bru!” he shouted, almost deliberately creating a fake sense of melodrama. I could not work out the content of all the murmurs he uttered under his breath, but I did manage to catch his lips mouthing things to the effect of, “Bloody pigs,” and, “Who knows what they could’ve done to her?” via the rear-view mirror at various moments on our journey to Nyanga Township. He looked straight into the back seat after every seemingly punitive comment he whispered to himself, which is what gave him away. His eyes were guiltily ridden with a kind of animosity towards me, the source of which went far deeper than my disapproval of him as Jennifer’s boyfriend. Jennifer being stranded in Nyanga meant something quite different to him than it did to me.

After driving up and down the dusty streets of Nyanga as a result of

not being able to find the street name on Brad’s GPS system – which he griped bitterly about too – we eventually resorted to asking community members and local petrol attendants for directions to the park near Moletsane Crescent. With their help, we found Jennifer, sitting on her own on one of the park’s cement benches. My heart sank at her dazed and wounded appearance. Jennifer stood up and stumbled towards the car as soon as she could identify that it was Brad’s. Her hair appeared pecked and knotted, pointing in all directions possible. Her tight-fitting cocktail dress was missing an entire sleeve and the zip which held her body tightly in her black cocktail dress had popped off. She was without her handbag. She hobbled towards Brad’s car barefoot, holding one high heel in one hand and her earring in the other. She opened the front passenger door, collapsed into the front seat and began that annoyingly devastating white-people sobbing again. The rest of the car was silent. Khanyi covered her eyes with her hands while I sat, expecting Brad to be as proactive and intrepid as he was over the phone and reach out to his wounded girlfriend, give her a hug of comfort or offer words of concern. Instead, Brad just stared abhorrently at Jennifer. His eyes paced her from the top of her dilapidated hair to her dirty toes.

I could not figure out the meaning of the intrigue on his face. I could not determine whether he was traumatised or ashamed, severely saddened or deeply disappointed. There was something melancholically sinister about the way he stared at Jennifer that almost broke my heart. Why was I getting emotional about a relationship that had nothing to do with me, let alone one I had chosen to divide myself from? Brad’s car was stationary, as was the atmosphere of devastation that choked all of us in the car. I intervened by breaking the silence.

“Jennifer, baby girl ” Jennifer loved it when I called her Baby Girl. She said I was the only one who could make those words sound as sincere as her late father had. She did not let anybody call her Baby Girl besides me. She joked about it sometimes, saying that there could be only one person at a time who could call her that and if I died first, she’d have to find a new person to pass the tradition on to. But death almost paid Jennifer a visit today. It dawned on me that Jennifer, my Baby Girl, almost passed away today. “We’re going to the clinic, Brad,” I said firmly. Jennifer had finished her sobbing by then. “No. I’m going back with Brad,” she groaned.

Brad shook his head in disapproval but said nothing. "Jennifer" I began sternly, "I know you haven't looked at yourself in the mirror recently but let me be the one to tell you that you look like shit. You probably feel like shit too. That's a guarantee. Brad, drop us off at the Celeste Clinic for Women and Children. It specialises in rape cases. I'll guide you towards it," I continued, googling the directions on my cell phone. Brad released a violent exhale but continued to keep his silence.

It was the first time I had mentioned the word rape to anyone. Even Khanyi gave me a shy glare that could have been vocally interpreted as "Rape? Have things gotten that far? Have things become that real?" I could hear the uncertainty and exhaustion in Jennifer's voice – her sentences were phonetically weak and inconsistent. She was unusually breathless, even more so when she spoke. I had suspicions about her having been drugged and possibly raped and that mortified me, which is why I suggested that Brad take us to that clinic in the first place. "No, Monds, I'm okay. I just need a good meal and some rest," she groaned. "Kind of a crazy night for all of us, huh? We still need to catch up on what you guys did last night. I'm going to start a trend on Twitter about it. Hashtag #WhiteGirlsInNyanga. You should use your big brain and write a book about it, Monds," she joked in an attempt to mitigate the severity of her situation. "Jennifer" I retorted punitively with a deep bass, loaded with offence and hostility.

"But that's the fucking problem right there, bru! Right there! White girls don't belong in Nyanga!" Brad barked. "Brad, nobody cares where white girls belong right now! Jennifer belongs in a doctor's room!" I reprimanded him just as loudly. I was careful not to include Khanyi in that sentence, because I could not allow myself to sell Khanyi's dignity to Brad and his dangerously oblivious – but possibly intoxicated – girlfriend in exchange for their understanding and affection, so I gave Khanyi a reassuring glance. She smiled in response. She understood. Ten minutes into our journey to the clinic, the car's newfound silence was broken by Brad. "You know, Jennifer, I just ... I just don't know anymore. About me, about you – About us ..." Although Brad's comment carried a tone of concern, it still came off as cowardly and insincere.

"Why?" Jennifer asked worryingly, even rising from her seat. "Argh. It's just – We'll talk about it later," Brad whined. Khanyi was slumped against the car door, asleep. I was out of Brad's rear-mirror view of the back seat: I was leaning my head against the car's door, seated behind him, which might have given him the idea that I was asleep as well. But I was not. I heard Brad's taut voice giving away his doubt, guilt and sense of wanting-out as Jennifer attempted to engage with her boyfriend. All the thoughts I had stifled and the voice of clear reason were tugging at my conscience as they did the first time I realised I had lost contact with Jennifer and Khanyi. Only this time, I could not postpone my conscious engagement with them any longer.

11:03
Brad parked at the drop-off zone of the Celeste Clinic for Women and Children. I rubbed a sleeping Khanyi maternally on her shoulder to wake her up as gently as possible. I got out of the car first to open Khanyi's door in gentleman-like fashion. I proceeded to open Jennifer's door. She sat stubbornly, her scarred and bloody legs crossed and her arms folded into her stomach. Bemused at her behaviour, I reminded her, "Jennifer, this is not about me" as she sat defiantly in Brad's passenger seat as though she had the chance to deliberately glue herself to it while no one was looking. "Can I just talk to Jennifer? I won't be long. I just need a word with her, quick quick," Brad said. Without verbal or visual acknowledgement, I slammed Brad's passenger door, angry at both of them for not seeming too keen on taking Jennifer's circumstances as seriously as they needed to be taken. But I was more resentful towards Jennifer for reasons more grave than her oblivious attitude towards her own condition.

I wrapped my arms around Khanyi while we stood outside the door of the reception area overlooking Brad's vehicle, ensuring that Brad did not start its engine and drive away with Jennifer – although there was nothing Khanyi and I could have done if that actually happened. The windows of Brad's vehicle were tinted, so I could not make out the nature of their expressions and their conversation. Minutes later, Jennifer emerged from Brad's vehicle with a defeated look weighing on her face. It was as though she had emotionally embraced her physically dilapidated appearance. Jennifer looked as though she had never smiled before, nor had any intention of ever doing so. She looked as though she had no reason to ever be joyous in her life again. Every reason to live seemed to have been

drained from her essence. She had not even appeared this miserable when her father passed away three years ago. Perhaps this was the first of many realisations: there would be times when Jennifer would need her father and he just wouldn't be there anymore. She tiptoed painfully towards Khanyi and me. I suspected that her feet may have been riddled with pieces of broken glass and other filth. I walked towards her and swung my arm's support behind her. Ruined but reunited, I walked my girlfriends into the doors of the Celeste Clinic for Women and Children.

Jennifer, Khanyi and I were sitting on plastic chairs in a humid waiting-room awaiting medical personnel. Jennifer sluggishly relayed to me what she could remember from the previous night. She could not remember much after her smoke with Brad on the balcony of the bar. However, she was more candid in explaining how she woke up under a tree in the park we had collected her from. She recalled, tearfully so, how she approached a shopkeeper of a spazaiv shop for help. Jennifer paused, emotionally overwhelmed as she cried silently. Khanyi threw her arms around her, pocketing Jennifer's head in the centre of her chest and rocking her gently. Jennifer rose from Khanyi's arms, regaining her strength to continue her explanation. "He made me kiss him," Jennifer stated, ashamed. "He said that if I did not kiss him, he would not allow me to use the spaza shop's phone," she continued, whispering this time. I sat silently, staring at Jennifer, in awe of the shameful significance of that number which appeared on my cell phone's screen that morning. The clinic's matron stepped into the room, indicating with a light wave and a modest smile that she was ready to attend to Khanyi and Jennifer.

I sat in waiting room of the clinic, rehearsing the words of comfort I would have offered to Jennifer – had the matron not stepped in to call them – in an effort to escape a mind overwhelmed with unanswered questions. But the thoughts which had started out as feelings of discomfort and small chirps had developed into cacophonous screams which demanded my attention. To begin my probe, I had to begin with Brad. I asked myself, "Why didn't I like him? Was it because I deemed him unfit to compliment Jennifer's character? Was it because I perceived him as unintelligible? Did I just not like him at all?"

I was far from satisfied when asking myself these questions because I could answer them with ease. I needed to be more frank with my rooted discomfort with Brad. I needed to identify what the real questions were. I found clarity when I drew my mind back to our journey to Nyanga Township to get Jennifer. His demeanour was punitive and accusatory. There was something resentful and unfair about his attitude towards Jennifer's predicament. Brad was angry. He was governed by the kind of anger that blames, shames and condemns without recourse. Brad was angry at me and he was angry at Nyanga Township, too. Instead of discussing where and when he and I had last seen Jennifer the previous night, he blamed me for not taking some sort undiscussed and assumed responsibility for her. Instead of suggesting what further steps to take to ensure Jennifer received adequate medical care and support, Brad snarled at me under his breath. When he had whispered his occasional insidious insults, he had looked into the rear-view mirror every time, checking that I had not caught what he said. Brad associated his demeaning, diminished and diseased perception of Nyanga Township with me because my being black was the only factor that could possibly associate me with his unhealthy perception of Nyanga Township, or any other township for that matter.

We had circled Nyanga for tens of minutes on end as his GPS could not locate the street on which Jennifer said she could be found, yet he was disturbed at my logical suggestion of asking members of Nyanga's community for reliable directions. In the eyes of Brad's mind I was no longer Jennifer's best friend (or fag hag, as Brad refers to me behind my back), but the person to whom he was hurling the questions without being interested in hearing the answers. Had Jennifer been found standing next to a public phone in a more affluent neighbourhood or an area known to have a substantial population of white citizens, would Brad's attitude towards me and Jennifer's circumstances have been any different? The truth of the matter was that there was a great and almost predictable chance he would have reacted differently.

My realisation about Brad was bitter, but needed to come to light. It brought me to addressing my rooted resentment towards Jennifer, which tended to confuse me. How could I have been angry at one of my best friends who'd had to live through a traumatic experience of this nature? Even I was overwhelmed by the event and later sought counselling for

it. In a feeble attempt to mitigate my resentment towards Jennifer, I verbally reminded myself – with a nervous whisper as I sat alone in the clinic’s waiting-room – that she’d had to live through the possibility of being drugged and/or raped, accompanied by the omnipresent potential of having her life taken at someone else’s will. Yet my resentment remained. Questioning Jennifer’s romantic choices would have been an insignificant attempt at resolving the depth of indifference I felt towards her. The reality was that I was resentful towards her because my picture-perfect perception of Jennifer – as a pampered, poodled and sheltered white princess who would probably remain that way until she died of old age – was uncomfortably interrupted by the reality of her standing face to face with the social vices of our society. I did not and would not intend for her to endure such a traumatic experience, not because she did not deserve to go through what she went through (which she did not, and neither does anyone else on this Earth, all of whom share the same right to safety, protection and preservation of their humanity), but my perception of her would not allow me to see her as a candidate for such victimisation. My superficial perception of Jennifer would uncritically agree with Brad when he retorted that white girls didn’t belong in Nyanga. But my resentment towards Jennifer was actually vicarious. The person I was really resenting was myself. I was retrospectively resentful towards myself as I could not comfortably synonymise the words “Drugs,” “Rape,” “HIV,” “Unwanted Pregnancy,” “Abortion,” or “Murder,” with Jennifer because of her being white and well-off. Which brings me to my almost-hereditary sympathy towards Khanyi and her circumstances. I was more likely to be more in tune with Khanyi because she was black. Getting to know her was easier than getting to know Jennifer. I was well-acquainted with Khanyi’s behaviour patterns, thoughts, perceptions, aspirations and even family – some of this information I do not yet know of Jennifer. Khanyi is a young lady who grew up in a Christian household in Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu-Natal. I know intimate details about the way her parents raised her and I know just how much her leaving home to attend boarding school in Johannesburg worried her. I can recall conversations about how she feared somehow losing the moral lessons and values her parents had instilled in her, which is why I understood just how much she valued her virginity. And when she lost that, it felt as though I lost something too. But the fact of the matter is that Khanyi behaved irresponsibly. She gave her virginity away to some man she met at a bar. But her virginity was not the only thing Khanyi gave away: Khanyi actually sold her dignity.

She risked contracting a sexually transmitted disease and conceiving an unwanted child because there was a notion in the depths of her consciousness as a black person that such risks are not necessarily or effectively associated with white skin. Yet, how much would the tables have been turned if a guy of colour had been grinding up on her in that bar? If it was a guy of colour sponsoring Khanyi’s shots and wooing her with a fake story about his family and his celibacy? If it was a guy of colour who was enticing her with the idea of a sexual experience? Throw in the argument of sexual preferences, weight, class, height, education, build, salary and whatever other superficial yardsticks the dating scene of the 21st century encourages people to use to measure the worth of potential mates, the truth is that a white male would have a better and easier opportunity of courting Khanyi successfully than a man of colour.

These realisations were as bitter as bile itself, but I had to bring them to my attention. Too many life-changing experiences had occurred that day for me to have walked out that clinic angry at being a victim of Brad’s dangerous association of me with Nyanga Township, resentful at Jennifer for being a privileged renegade who overstepped her cultural boundaries and almost got burnt by the vices I perceived as alien to her, or sympathising with Khanyi for just not being able to say “no.” I could not walk out of that clinic after having put two of my girlfriends on ARVs, wishing only one had more of a chance at survival because I was more concerned for her being identified as a statistic first, rather than as a human who made a mistake second, her entire life.

Racial affinity and racial identification revealed themselves to be the consistent themes when I was unpacking my feelings and experiences regarding the 29th of December. These two subjects were the basis of my anger at Brad, my resentment towards Jennifer, and my sympathy for Khanyi. It did not concern me enough that Jennifer could have been drugged and/or raped. I did not care that Khanyi’s behaviour was irresponsible. Neither did I care to realise that Brad’s manner of thinking was identical to mine, all because my decisions were rooted and governed by a system of thinking which prioritised comfortability in affiliation and identity before any other decision-making factor. Brad associated me with Nyanga Township because I am black, yet the painful part of that association was knowing that Brad’s perception of township life and culture was very likely to be poisoned with negativity. I was not

angry at Brad for making the association. I was angry that Brad associated me with something widely perceived as unclean, uncouth and uncivilised. I made the mistake of falling into his way of thinking by believing in his perception of Nyanga as a place of dirt and danger. Brad affiliating me with Nyanga was demeaning, but comfortable for him, regardless of whether or not he was aware that the intention of his affiliation was wrong. But you see, I made the same mistake with Jennifer. I affiliated the colour of Jennifer’s skin to everything associated with privilege and prestige, which automatically distanced her from the realities of drugs, teenage pregnancies, HIV, abortions and murder – in my thinking. I was very uncomfortable with the possibility of Jennifer being a rape victim or a potential teenaged mother because the superficial affiliations I prescribed to myself about her did not allow me to objectively see her as a possible candidate to be affected by these social vices. So I chose to deal with that uncomfotability by being bitter and resentful towards Jennifer.

My sympathy for Khanyi was more of a knee-jerk reaction against the resentment I felt towards Jennifer and a defence mechanism against Brad associating me with Nyanga, rather than the heartfelt response to a sheltered Zulu girl I gave earlier in this narrative. I did not want Khanyi to be perceived as another teenage pregnancy statistic or a university drop-out. The anger I felt towards Brad and the resentment I felt towards Jennifer only fuelled my gravitation towards protecting and favouring Khanyi. Young black girls are so readily affiliated to these statistics – and rigorously so – that it forms part of the way we identify them and the way they identify themselves when they are found to be in those circumstances.

Statistic-before-story precisely describes the mentality of a nation that continues to see nothing abnormal about associating a person of colour with hereditary failure. What is even more gravely discouraging is that people of colour in this country incorporate these devaluing notions as part of the perceptions of their own kind and themselves as individuals. People of colour are very susceptible to seeing themselves as inadequate. I did not want that for Khanyi. I was more proactive in wanting to prevent Khanyi from being known as another statistic of a dysfunctional society than confronting her about her irresponsible decisions – and the possible consequences thereof. This non-conscious impartiality stemmed from my comfortability with being able to identify with her because she

is black. This is just how deeply racial affinity and racial identification operates from within us and at times – more often than we choose to admit or realise – these racially-based affinities and identities are at the root of many of our reactions and emotional responses we cannot immediately or easily understand and account for. Therefore, we need to identify and treat issues of racial affinity and racial identity where they originate and manifest, which is in the absolute depths of ourselves. Our South African society is too ready to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to engaging with issues concerning racial affiliation and identity.

We either deny the existence of these issues or often misinterpret them as miniscule, unimportant or too harmful for discussion. We tell ourselves as individuals and, subsequently as a society, that it is inappropriate to make observations and question why white kids are hanging with other white kids and black kids are hanging with other black kids on the fields of a school that advocates full integration. We think it is too contemptuous to discuss why some black women prefer weaving western hair into their own while others wear their own natural hair. God forbid if Nomasonto Ndlovu asks her group of girlfriends why they clapped and congratulated her after she called them over to help her get dolled up for her first date with Christopher Harmse. The fundamental cornerstone we must understand about racial affiliation and racial identification is just how tightly these subjects are fastened to our individual and national thinking, particularly as South Africans living in a post-apartheid era. The story of Jennifer, Khanyi, Brad and myself serves as anecdotal evidence of just how deeply racially-based affiliation and identification govern our ways of thinking.

The second cornerstone we need be clear about is that racially-affinitive and identity-based thinking actually require acute and bottomless engagement by the individual and the society, especially for the sake of a progressive democratic atmosphere in our South African context. We need to employ a culture of thought, expression and engagement where we are able probe the way we think as individuals and as a society. It is imperative that we graduate to that stage in our personal and national engagement where we are able to adequately and dynamically measure how much we owe our systems of thinking and decision-making to racially-based affiliation and identification. In relation to this engagement, it is also imperative that we reach a stage where we are able to engage

honestly and unashamedly about racial affiliation and racial identification. A proactive attitude towards conscious engagement creates a constructive atmosphere that encourages people to be okay with being critical about their thoughts, their decisions and subsequent implications, the discourse of their families, communities, economy and politics. However, the ultimate cornerstone we need to recognise is that we need to be more awake and aware about the manner in which we recognise and address racial affiliation and racial identification. Racially-based affiliation and identification are long-serving cognitive pathologies that disturb the way we engage with issues as human beings first rather than as human salad – dressed by age, race or economic class. Therefore, Nomasonto Ndlovu’s friends cannot authentically justify themselves by euphemistically stating that they are just happy that Nomasonto is on the dating scene again when the true nature of their congratulations is as a result of a system of thinking which sees a black woman dating a white man as a social or even economic achievement. On the same note, Nomasonto’s friends should not be lambasted for telling that truth or be fearful of telling as much.

As mentioned before, racial affiliation and racial identification disturb the way we should be thinking as human beings. It not only disturbs the natural course of our humanity, it distances us from that humanity as well. I should have been equally concerned for Jennifer’s well-being as I was for Khanyi’s. Even more so, my intentions to help Jennifer and Khanyi should have been identically sound. My perception of Jennifer as a privileged white girl who had no business being raped, living with HIV, or birthing unwanted children subconsciously interfered with my genuine intention to simply help my best friend out of a traumatic situation. On the other hand, my trepidation towards Khanyi becoming known as a generic HIV, teenaged pregnancy or university-drop out statistic interfered with my genuine intention to confront her about her irresponsible behaviour, possibly preventing her and others like her from making the same mistake.

Racial affinity and racial identity are not tools for racial fence-sitting; neither are they just another species or form of racism. To loosely phrase and define a broadly interpreted concept of what racism is: racism is the blatant, deliberate and debilitating action of oppression, suppression, isolation and subjugation of one racial member or population by another, through institutional, legal, economic, social, socio-economic and socio-cultural means. However, the psychological

impact and legacy of this oppression is what we as South Africans are living with today. It would be harsh and incorrect to label others like me, Jennifer, Khanyi or Brad as racists, because of the hereditary way in which we racially affiliate and identify when we think. Could it be possible that I – a suburban poster-child for black economic achievement, a supermodel for a post-apartheid society and member of the so-called Born Free generation – may be wandering around with a racist intention or agenda? It appears that I have bigger preoccupations, such as convincing the older generations that tweeting all day while keeping tabs on Beyonc’s career moves is not all that I aspire to. We are comfortable as a South African society to sit at the national dining-room table and throw food at one another over “racism,” while the important subtleties of racial affinity and racial identity remain the real, yet undiscussed, elephants in the room. Racial affinity and racial identity exist deeply in the thinking of South African people, regardless of what race one might be, what social and economic class one may be categorised under, or what era one belongs to.

There is nothing evil about me feeling a certain way about my experiences or perceiving those experiences from a racially-affinitive and identity-based perspective of thinking, because these feelings and perceptions require my attention and engagement. I know better than to sit on the fences of racial affinity and racial identity like a curious pigeon, comfortably watching my own thoughts, responses and experiences from a bird’s-eye view without critically engaging with them. I know better than to irrationally pursue a solution to a problem I have not taken the time or effort to understand. I also know better than to evade a problem by irrationally seeking a solution I have no intention of applying to that problem. Rather, I am practising being a vessel of honesty by spearheading proactive, unashamed, conscious and constructive engagement with my thoughts, expressions, reactions and experiences. I am now practising being able to understand the scope of how much racially-based affinitive and identity-based thinking affects my internal and external environments.

I am now attempting to correct my pathologically racially-rooted way of thinking, and accommodating new ideas on healthy, constructive and bias-free ways to approach a renewed way of thinking. I am practising a new state of living. I am practising my humanity. Progress is not evident overnight, but collective hard work will always be rewarded. As the Egyptian proverb professes: “Birds of all kinds will land together.” I want to do more than wish that each and every South African does their share

of hard work so that we may all reap the fruits of existing in a society that is conscious and critical. I cannot wait to live in a society where the full potential of Ubuntu is realised.

As for my warm household of homies,^v we’re currently in recovery. It turns out that Jennifer was in fact drugged as they found Rohypnol in her system: a depressant typically used to spike alcoholic beverages, causing muscle relaxation and profound drowsiness. However, no evidence of sexual intercourse was found by the clinic’s personnel. Regardless of this, the clinic put her on a course of provisional ARVs as a precautionary measure.

Khanyi underwent a counselling session with the clinic’s nurses and took an HIV test which showed up to be negative. She was prescribed a course of ARVs and she is expected to take another HIV test in six weeks.

Jennifer and Brad broke up.

Khanyi, Jennifer and I have opted to collectively seek professional counselling, not only to heal us as individuals, but to strengthen the bond of our friendship.

But for now, Khanyi, Jennifer and I are sitting in our apartment, under the covers of Jennifer’s bed, sipping on Oros while concluding the writing of this diary entry. For the first time in history, I, Monde Maseko turned this personal ritual of diary-entering into a collaborative effort. I thank Jennifer Liebenberg and Khanyi Mkhwanazi for making this the longest, but most honest and healing, story I have ever told.

Dear Diary,
Happy New Year.

This narrative is a moderate adaptation of a real-life occurrence. The names, locations and characters in this narrative have been adapted in preservation of their identities.

Endnotes:

i Broke My Back:

A colloquial African-American phrase used to describe an intense display of physical movement and flexibility, particularly when dancing.

ii Vogued for my life:

A colloquial American phrase originated and used by the homosexual community. The word Vogue is a form of modern dance which is characterised by a flamboyant display of photo shoot-inspired poses in conjunction with fast-paced synthesised music (originally inspired by the Disco genre).

iii Bru:

A colloquial South African term usually used in friendly reference to another male individual.

iv Spaza:

A small shop either made from makeshift materials such as corrugated iron or a cargo container. Spaza shops are found predominantly in townships and rural areas of South Africa and sell basic necessities such as bread, milk, canned food and basic household cleaning products.

v Homies:

A colloquial term used to refer to a group of close friends. This term was originally used in African-American dialect but is progressively becoming a term used globally, predominantly by youths.





POP bottles



POP BOTTLES

Lebohang 'Nova' Masango

The first Pop Bottles in Johannesburg for the year 2012 was a colour-themed event held on a Sunday at Helderfontein Estate. It was greatly anticipated by all of the city's celebrity-lites, socialites, the lovers of good times, and those simply wanting to find out what the hype was all about. As cars drove into the venue, they were subjected to stringent security measures that called to mind a big music concert and not so much a relaxed, daytime hip hop event. Once security checks were done, people walked into a beautiful garden by the river, dotted with various lounge areas, two bars on both sides and a DJ deck inside the pool. As the opening hour of the event came and went, the venue came alive with Johannesburg's most gorgeous people. The women were all outdoing themselves and well-dressed in their predominantly Zara and Forever New outfits, pricey weaves and other do's. The men were more casual and a little less effort was made on the fashion side of things. Various DJs got the mood going with laid-back hip hop during the day and more up-tempo tunes as the sun set and people started dancing. At one point in the night, AKA got on stage and performed a few of his hits. It was a great way to close off the last few hours of the party, but AKA is hardly exciting to watch anymore because he is one of the few (talented, yes) who are rotated in the spotlight. Overall, it was a great event with an amazing turnout.



Photography [Mack Michael Magagane]

An important question posed by Lakhanya Mahlati is whether Pop Bottles contributes to the cultural discourse of South Africa. By virtue of its growing popularity, I would assert that it does, regardless of whether the contribution is seen as positive or not. Events like Homecoming Picnic in Pretoria and Stay Fresh Saturdays, which began in Cape Town, are also well-attended gatherings that appeal to a similar market. There has been steady growth in the hip hop industry, including fresh talent in the form of hosts, DJs, musicians as well as cross-promotional associations with brands, media and apparel. The more stakeholders join the initiative, the more the objective of these events – to market a "lifestyle" – becomes tangible. As these events become important fixtures in more social calendars, more people are indeed buying into this "lifestyle" and, therefore, this deems it a necessary point of conversation. Altogether, the recreation, time and money that revolve around the music, fashion and even alcohol consumption are the main symbols of cultural engagement in these spaces. Pop Bottles and its contemporaries are telling indicators of where the minds of some of the affluent, black youth of Johannesburg are, and what they consider to be worthy leisure pursuits.

The music at such gatherings is mostly US hip hop, peppered well with South African hip hop and Kwaito. An exciting element of this, however, is that the growth of the industry, including DJs collaborating with rappers, has ensured that more South African music is played. The fashion choices are the usual trends and the stronger behavioural indicator of socio-economic positioning is the "popping bottles" aspect. Of course, the nuance is clear: this has nothing to do with soft drinks, beer or wine. It is understood that there is a hierarchy of alcohol, around what kinds of bottles are worthy of being "popped," as opposed to merely opened. If you aren't clear, I suggest that the next time you are in a nightclub, look out for which bottles are brought in with great fanfare: sparklers, semi-naked women or lowered from a cage in the ceiling. Do these events contribute positively to the discourse? I would say that investing oneself in finding an answer to this misses the point. Firstly, influences from American pop culture have been around for generations and are obviously here to stay. Even though there seems to be nothing innovative or ground-breaking at all in any of the cultural symbols that these events produce or engage in, and even though it may simply be summed up as nightclub social performances occurring during the day, young people spending their time, money and youth on good times that

aren't necessarily an intellectual exercise is just as valid as any other activity. Secondly, there is no comfort in the notion that what wealthy, upwardly mobile youth are interested in ought to be endlessly dissected with the aim of finding something to vilify. Using myself as an example, there are multi-faceted people who enjoy these spaces for what they are and are still able to participate meaningfully in society. Although it would seem that there is no effort to create a space of cultural interaction or reproduction that includes unique, South African perspectives, the very existence of the event on South African soil with people of this land is enough of a mixture of cultures. South African pop culture is steadily moving away from what detractors would deem the monotonous recycling of American club culture and lifestyle aspirations. The whole world is under the American spell and it may take a while to break so I am able to regard such events with optimism. The significance of Pop Bottles is that people consciously choose to support this movement, to support their own. Entrepreneurs and musicians are supplying the demand for these experiences and also creating inclusive, organic spaces in which musicians and fans can interact.

When we look back at Pop Bottles, Homecoming Picnic, Stay Fresh Saturdays and all the other new events, we'll be able to do so with pride. That's how it is.



Will Work for PURPOSE

WILL WORK FOR PURPOSE

Megan Bryer

When we were young (and used to rule the world), we all dreamt of the day that we'd reach the end of the rainbow – the magnificent, awe-inspiring real world. What we overlooked is the fact that in the years between high school and our first job, we've been conditioned to buy into the world as it is – in our heads, not in reality. By the time we graduate, we know the value of a Blackberry or iPhone 4, not just in monetary terms, but also in social status. We know how to want. How to want the house and the car and though some of us will boldly declare ourselves different, exempt from materialistic and other desires, it is said with one envious eye on the neighbour's wife.

Backing out of the race all together means never knowing how you'd have fared. Choosing the road less travelled is simply that – a lonely one. And it takes an insane amount of courage (more so in the absence of alcohol) to trust that this choice is the right one, not having royally devastated an attempt at the game. And so it is that you wake up one morning, at an ungodly hour (because that's when people who've sold their daylight hours wake), don your grey suit and your appeasing smile, and make your way into the "real" world.

For those of you not yet at the fork in the road that has you deciding whether to sign over your soul for the security of a monthly cheque (and the look of pride in your father's eyes) or ride off into the glorious sunset to live off baked beans and toast and favours and prayer, in case you pick the former, here are some age-old ways to help get you through your day.

First and foremost is the necessity to master the use of equivocal responses. They say ignorance is bliss – the trick is to convince yourself. For practice in this regard, watch how your parents react when you ask for something big and expensive after you've told them how much you love them. Take notes on the backstepping, sidestepping, dodging and general ambiguity with which they beat completely around the bush. This technique is important in the workplace when asked, "How are you?" "How is it going?" "How's the new job?" and, on a good day, "Hi?" The second point of call is to set aside time for your existential crisis. Some need to prepare more extensively than others. You will learn how

best to deceive yourself – be it denial of, or in the rare case, confronting, the issue. The triggers are tricky bastards and you won't always see them coming. Sneaking some Facebook time into your day, you may stumble upon a status that reads, "Watching the African sun slip below the horizon as the children of Malawi kick around a soccer ball on a sandy field, oblivious to their plight." It may also be an advert for a fashion show or rock concert that you never couldn't attend. The most lethal of these triggers are the stories of people you've always considered on a par with yourself, doing whatever it is that you're not doing. And that's just the point – existential crises aren't rational. They're all about the "What if?" and that is a limitless realm. A deep and empty void to stumble upon.

The third and most drastic tip is probably the only one that's guaranteed to work. Choose. And I mean this in the whole-hearted sense of the word. We're all standing on the cliff of brilliance, clinging desperately to mediocrity. Whatever path you choose will have its hardships. Owning your own time may entail skipping eating from day to day, and selling it means sometimes you have to accept that every second won't enthrall you. Some of us will live as if tomorrow's the last day (we love you, Jimmy Dean); the rest believe that there's life after 30. The great thing is that it's up to you. Listening to the radio, I hear a news report about how Zimbabweans are now being offered the opportunity to work for food. What are you working for?



Ziyaduma J'Emzini WEZINSIZWA



ZIYADUMA ‘EMZINI WEZINSIZWA’ Spoek Mathambo

“Emzini Wesinsizwa” is my favourite sitcom ever. No sarcastic valley girl voice either. I am being about as deadly serious as I can at this point. I’m drawn to absurdly wonderful things that make the skid marks in life seem less odorous. I ride with the fearless, who aren’t too concerned about pretentious standards of “sexy.” It’s raw and that’s what makes it real. I appreciate that the first instinct is to call it ironic/smartass/desperate: in hater-mode I do the same. It’s natural, like wishing someone dead. Realtalk: how could I honestly and earnestly enjoy/respect (or in nasal private school voice, be able to stomach) the shabbily-shot, badly-acted, elementary piece of third world television?

I contend that it is an important, insightful exploration and celebration of the lives of a sizeable chunk (majority?) of South African society: the black, urban working class. “Emzini Wezinsizwa” (in English: “House of Boys/Young Men”) is named for the place where most of the action takes place: Johannesburg single sex hostels that were built by the apartheid government. They were built to house the city’s dregs, working outside of the mining industry, but considered essential for running the city (factory workers, builders, cleaners and city workers). The housing projects were set up in a calculatedly divisive manner, separating people by tribal group, marital status and gender (designed to inhibit any notion of permanent life). For example, you might find one for fat-bellied, married Zulu men, whose wives and kids live thousands of kilometres away on some rural, poverty stricken, desolate but breath-taking rolling hill ... or one for single Malawian or Mozambican guys who left their countries for Jozi’s bright lights and hooker rashes.

That I wear the unnecessarily severe favourite sitcom claim with pride, and take every given opportunity wherever I am in the world to tell people about the show, is mere excitement at having seen something awesome and wishing to share. I have tried to buy every available series DVD on the market (with moderate success which has entailed spending between R30 in shady back-alleys with the ever-philanthropic Carlton Centre bootleggers and R200 with that even shadier beast, the SABC). My nom de plume, Spoek Mathambo, is a sly reference to something the programme’s Chirwali once said about ghosts in a hilariously absurd (if

not slightly morbid) episode about a conman with an HIV/Aids cure. Growing up in Soweto in the late 80s and early 90s, I thought hostel dwellers to be especially Zulu and especially vile and violent people. I put this down to the pervasive macho culture coupled with the absence of women and family life. During the period, hostel dwellers assumed key roles in a new type of political violence that had all of us township dwellers in fear. The media simplified this wave of brutal violence as a clash between Zulu (hostel dwellers) and Xhosa speakers (township people), shorthand for the underlying conflict between two major political parties, the ANC and the (Zulu nationalist) IFP, which had waged a campaign in hostels to extend its support base in Johannesburg. The level of violence and acts of terrorism could be termed a sort of civil war. Later evidence showed the apartheid government’s involvement in providing arms as well as blatantly inciting some of the attacks in an apparent attempt to destabilise the approaching democratisation of South Africa. Hostels became barracks, breeding grounds for an army of men. They were strongholds from which attacks could be planned and coordinated and fortresses to which residents could retreat. Throughout the period, hundreds of men, women and children were killed in what was known as the Hostel Wars.

And so hostels seemed to me a never-ending spring of brutality ... fuelled by mbamba, bred by a macho culture and cramped living conditions. I did not view all this from a distance. On more than one occasion I remember my father feverishly locking the car doors as we were surrounded by throngs of impis with red cloths around their arms or heads, wielding all means of rusty axes, and the army roadblocks that would make me hours late for school. The fear in all of us was so extreme that, as my mother never tires to recount, she sent me to primary school before time, out of worry that she might be killed any day and so I should at least have the first few moments of schooling covered before her head was split open by a nobkiri or panga or the pellet from a homemade shotgun.

The TV show takes this painful and morbid hostel history and flips it around by showing the other side of hostel life ... it definitely changed my idea of what hostels were. It douses the drab face brick concentration camp buildings with heaps of comedy and hijinks. It shows these houses of men as a breeding ground for camaraderie and intercultural respect. The premise of the show is that the inhabitants of Room 8 are a mixed bag of men from many different tribes and places and much of the

comedy comes from all of their cultural and linguistic peculiarities. From know-it-all Xhosa Chawe to the Zulu traditionalists Magubane (an inyanga/medicine man/shaman) and Khabazela: to gambling, womanising Sotho jester Mofokeng; and bumbling Malawian Chirwali. The supporting cast includes other hostel dwellers, visiting rural family, a snitchin’ drunk called S’beko, an austere and strict security guard/nduna, some township folk, and domestic worker girlfriends who live in backrooms in white suburbs.

I don’t remember exactly when the show started being so important to me, but I remember a time BEW (before “Emzini Wezinsizwa”). I was completely indifferent and the sound of my dad laughing to the show would have me reeling and gagging in embarrassment. I would try my damndest to eat my dinner fast and get the hell out of hearing range. It was most definitely the least cool thing on TV – five middle-aged RURAL-type dudes living in a dingy hostel, constantly bouncing between Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Chirwali’s dodgy brew of languages. That was a time when, if you asked me about South African comedy, you would get a blank stare, which would be followed by a dazed and detached rattling off of relics of the late 80s: “Velaphi”, “Sgudis nyc” or, God forbid, my mouth would dry out and my pink lips spew that rainbow nation nugget, “Suburban Bliss.” These names would come to me, but not before being overcome by shame ... you see I was a laanie 12-year-old who saw Americana as the pinnacle of modern culture and “Seinfeld” as its comedic apex.

It was only later, when I turned 13, that I “came back” home through an identity crisis resultant from seeing the vast majority of my (mostly white) Grade 9 class, typex swastikas on their space cases (... long story). And so to balance the dead-pan militancy of my newly found “proud black fist” (with its droll starter pack of nappy hair, Maya Angelou and god-awful poetry), I needed the absurd hilarity (and subtle “every man” poignancy) of “Emzini Wezinsizwa”.

As a card-carrying member of the Cheese Boy Club, it’d be disingenuous of me to claim that my love for “Emzini Wezinsizwa” stems from being able to deeply relate with the places or people described in the show. I cannot say that I know what hostel life feels like, but I am glad that it has broken down my prejudice for hostel people. It humanised their existence beyond being horny, bloodthirsty dregs. “Emzini Wezinsizwa” shows them to be my hilarious, distant (favourite) uncles, full of rich

stories from a place I have never been.





Open
mind

ONE MIND OPEN

Gabriel Crouse

*“But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at.” -Iago, Othello*

For a man of his age, 23, graduated, he has, in his opinion, posed the question of sex damn well. No encounter can be narrated to represent the form this question takes: if he began to detect a pattern, a habit or an element of ritual, then, disappointed, he changed his course. To an outsider a list of the women with whom he’d had sex would seem haphazard and unlikely; to him it would seem pointless. It would, in fact, seem deeply misguided – and considering the philosophical attitude that he has towards our question, no such list has ever been made. He has no “number.”

Five years ago the international freshmen at his ivy-league university arrived three days earlier than their American peers to learn about American culture and acclimate (not acclimatise). The first time they gathered for a lecture some professor explained the way things would be done, academically. “The Socratic method”: question and answer, not parroting; question and answer, not sucking up; question and answer, not fighting – and always this aversion to showing off. He didn’t know anything about Socrates, didn’t understand immediately how the wisest man could be the one who claimed to know nothing at all, but he got the message. Don’t let on everything you know and you’ll stand a better chance of learning something new.

He often wished that he’d applied that lesson more to his academic work than he had to sex. Still, sex seemed to be the question of his age. He asked that question with women older and much older, and some a little younger. With women of different races. With happy women and sad women. Women fast and slow and subliminal. Basically, he didn’t want to do it the way he wanted to do it. He played dumb, implicitly asking, “What is your idea of a good time?” He was not always surprised at the answer, but often enough he was left thinking, “I never would have thought of that,” a thought he locates at the centre of New York’s engine.

Consultants and investment bankers, half of his friends, make a ritual out of the weekend brunch. It’s an occasion that scoops old friends away from professional pressures, allowing them to drop the office persona

(dragged along to business dinners and team-building tequila nights) and gives their old college selves breathing room.

“If you could suck your own cock, would you?”

He’d thought of this before, the answer was no. As Louis CK has it, he’d never yet seen a penis that had appealed to him. His friend answered, “DEFINITELY.” He was gay, so all the guys laughed.

The brunch was boozy and our man was unusually thirsty. His college (ex)girlfriend had just flown in from Paris and he was hoping to see her, hoping she wouldn’t avoid him, pretending she hadn’t told him she’d arrive a week later, trying to focus on her friend’s invitation to her Welcome Back Party!... trying to forget the mutual embarrassment when he and her friend realised that he was not supposed to be invited. He got home and smoked a joint with JP, a law student from Waterkloof, before taking a shower. He looked at his dick: “I just don’t get it.” Dinner with wine, dessert with vodka, he was ready to find her.

The party was at one of his locals, which seemed like a good sign. At 9pm things were pretty dull so he went to the payphone around the corner to rally support. Half an hour, R7 in quarters and a cluster of lame voice messages later he gave up. “How the FUCK do I not have a phone?!” When he feels kak about his inability to take care of valuable stuff he likes to connect with real people, bum a cigarette in the park or strike up conversation in a bar. People in New York, if they’re sitting still for a minute, tend to be keen on a little human connection. That kept him busy until 11pm.

He went back to the payphone. This time everyone he called answered. Every one of them was loose and fun and looking for action. “Come over to KC’s.” “Dude, this album launch is dank!” “I’m getting wasted at this office party but let’s, you know, chase tail at The Jane around one?”

The street around him was lit up by street lights, traffic lights, promo-lights, smartphones, cigarettes and the lights reflected off glass windows, pools of water and teeth. He was feeling damn sorry for himself in his grimy phone booth.

“I can’t leave this place.”

He couldn’t say why. He realised he was calling to invite people over but he hadn’t even said where he was. “Fuck it, maybe at, like, two.”

That’s when I changed gear and decided to dance. There was a raised platform, a stage, on one side of the dance floor. I found an opening in

the corner of the room, faced the DJ behind her booth, and danced.

The focus was 80’s disco-pop with complements from Daft Punk, Bruce Springsteen and Fun. When it got hot Michael Jackson tracks elbowed through one after the next, amping the energy, the nostalgia and the sexual tension. When the first MJ song was laid down I got a nod from the DJ, permission to let go. I felt great.

I didn’t want to get close to anyone since I was still hoping that she would arrive with her friends. Obviously this made me a challenge to prowling eyes and arms and hips. I don’t know how they could tell – but I must’ve seemed like a dark horse. I danced with my eyes closed and with them open, I jumped up and down and twirled a few women around. In short, for once in my life, I owned the dance floor.

At 3am the bar started to close down. I had a bus to catch at 7am so sleeping seemed like a bad idea. At the coat-check, people complained about how tired they were. But one slick little guy caught my eye.

“You’re not done, are you?”

“Nah, man – you know anywhere that’s still happening?”

“Yeah, let’s do it!”

We got in a cab and he told me we were headed to The Rainbow, a gay bar I’d been to before. I’d been there with a girl once, left with her and drank pineapple daiquiris between. It wasn’t my first choice, but what else was I going to do? Plus, I thought about the potentially free drinks. “Want some?”

He had a little bag of white powder. Later he told the cabbie to stop. “We’re actually really close to my apartment. You wanna hit a bowl first, settle things down a bit before we go to the club?”

I was relieved to mission along with such a friendly guy. The one time I’d been to The Rainbow I saw two dudes holding each other’s dicks in the restroom so I wanted to consolidate my mental state before going in. “Thanks man, why not?”

Inside his stylishly furnished apartment it was quiet. We soberly spoke about his efforts to make it as a stage actor in the big city. I paced over his lacquered floorboards and examined the tasteful black-and-white photos of his role models. I told him I wanted to be an actor too, which was almost true. He only had one chair so I sat on his black bed. We complained about how many gays work the industry: he complained more. We lit up. I ignored my urge to say, “You know I’m not gay,” like a tit.

“So, are you gay?”

“Nah. I’m pomosexual.”

He laughed, “I’ve never heard anyone actually say that.”

It means postmodern sexual, no categories. I explained my refusal to buy into the notion that people are inclined to one gender or another. I was high so I probably used phrases like “societal imposition,” “pigeonhole” and, I’m sorry to say, “Just be yourself.”

We bounced ideas off each other about the ancient Greeks and animal homosexuality and I concluded: “The special thing about humans is that sex is such a personal encounter; it is much more about two personalities connecting than about humping and panting. Never mind the categories of men and women, or blacks and whites, or freaks and geeks – every person is different.”

He was twitching excitedly. “So you’re really open-minded?”

“I dunno, man, if you’re too open-minded your brain’ll fall out.”

He laughed and then fixed his face.

“I want you to lie back. I’m going to take off your jeans and suck your cock, you’ll like it.”

He must’ve seen something in my face.

“I want it. I want you. You don’t have to touch me. I just want to make you happy.”

I just want to make you happy.

In a way it made sense. He’d been a comrade in the fight for the night, laughed at my jokes, given me his drugs. It would surely feel good. Something new. I lay back. He unbuckled my belt and pulled off my jeans. He put his hand on my flaccid crotch.

For a man of my age, 23, graduated, I was, in my opinion, posing the question even-handedly.

I was laid-back, all the way. He pulled back his hand. I relaxed my head and closed my eyes, like four years of hard philosophy problems had taught me. In New York everything is about sex, except sex. Sex is about power. Repression is wasted strength. There is such a thing as a free lunch, losers just come late. Get serviced.

Okay. Problem is, I’m short one full boner. His hair is blacker, greasier. Hers is like guitar strings in the dusty dusk. She’s just outside the window, ready to come in, welcome back. Still completely flaccid, but if she comes across the room and takes off her coat and boots, then maybe ...

I couldn’t do it. He made me a cup of tea. I became emotional as I told him about her, how much I wanted her to let me back into her life. That’s probably why he made the tea. I was sad. He had been so open and kind and for the first time since our breakup I suddenly had a friend I



Miss Thengeduze Cash and Carry

MISS THENGEDUZE CASH AND CARRY

Buyani Duma

I won my first beauty pageant (by mistake) when I was five years old. It was December and every young Immaculate, Perseverance and Delicate was entering "Miss Thengeduze Cash and Carry," which meant that I too had to enter if I wanted to secure my playground social status. My mother opposed the idea like Chomee does clothes. She didn't have money to relax my frizzy 'fro and, apparently, only girls with relaxed hair enter beauty pageants. But I entered, regardless of my K-word hair. A few days later the whole village gathered under a two-pole tent while the other contestants and I got ready inside the shop. Miss Thengeduze Cash and Carry was about to begin! My nerves were under control until Magistrate's mom asked me, "Why are you wearing your Sunday dress? The theme is costumes!"

And indeed, when I looked around, all the other girls were clad in swimming costumes of the latest styles and the brightest neon colours. My horror at that moment couldn't even be equated to a response to the world's most premature ejaculation! I was close to pulling out when the Nonhle Thema in me told me to model in my Sunday panty. And I did. I shoved the excess full-panty fabric into the crack of my blackgirl ass to make it look like a whitegirl thong.

I walked into the tent with Connie Ferguson's confidence, swaying my hips and sticking out my bare chest for the excited crowd! "MODELA MODELA." I spanked my butt cheek, snapped my fingers and turned around, smiling from fake beauty spot to fake beauty spot. I was relieved at how things were going until I found out there was a question-and-answer section, when Malum Meshack (owner of Thengeduze Cash and Carry) would ask us random questions. I didn't like speaking in front of lots of people and I certainly didn't like talking to MEN so when Malum Meshack asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, instead of saying, "Madam," I said what my favourite soapie actress used to say to men who spoke to her. "Who do you think you are? How dare you!" I replied in English and the crowd went MAD! Stokvel ladies were ululating while the church ladies fainted! Taxi drivers started fighting with each other in joy!

"Nondindwa can speak English! Nondindwa can speak English!" People were excited by the fact that a five-year-old blackgirl could utter a few English words, even if they were severely out of context. Even if she didn't know what they meant, the fact that she had said it in English when all the other girls spoke isiZulu was enough reason to crown her Miss Thengeduze Cash and Carry! I went home with a brand new electric iron and a box of Jam Alley chocolate bars. Soon the Gospel of the English-speaking blackgirl reached the neighbouring villages and they invited me to compete in their pageants. I went on to win Miss Asiduri Trading Store, Miss Foot-Sack Tuck Shop, Miss Fundanawe Creche and many other pageants by uttering the same English words. I was celebrated for speaking a language whose words I did not understand and whose history I did not know. I was never applauded for my excellent isiZulu. Only English mattered. Even today, I struggle to associate my own language with sophistication and intelligence, and that beauty pageant is to blame. The seeds of self-hatred and inferiority were planted in me then, and now they have grown into a vicious thorn bush that pricks me every time I try to destroy it.

It's the same with South Africa: the seeds of self-hate and inferiority were planted over 300 years ago in the minds of blackgirls and the thorn bush is still alive. And growing. Are we brave enough to cut ourselves in the process of trying to uproot it? Are we brave enough?

Miss Thengeduze Cash and Carry





THAT'S HOW IT IS NOT

Max Barashenkov

"The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing." – Socrates

"So □ what happened? Your piece was due on the 24th," he messages me. Christ. How do I tell this kid that I was too busy getting high and staying up till 7am playing board games to write any kind of 2012 roundup for his shitty blog? And who the fuck does he think I am to be able to put forward a summary of the events of the past year? I sold out, nigga, haven't you heard? I sell tits not words these days. 2012 roundup? Fine. People died: another American president was elected: South African mines finally went ape-shit and pointed out, to those blind cocksuckers that haven't seen it already, the retarded nature in which the ANC approached post-94 transformation – instead of addressing the real

issues such as land/mine redistribution/nationalisation/theft they went for a PR blitz of a Rainbow Nation and jamming any illiterate son-of-a-bitch that could fit into a CEO chair: some people devoured each other, bummed out at the world enough to hit up bath salts; Mahala, the venomous alternative media platform from Cape Town, gloriously ate shit, with all its writers leaving, now a pale shadow of its former self: civil wars raged on around Africa: THIIIS spent a train-load of money on Oppi coverage and got nothing in return: and somewhere some not-so-shitty bands released a whole lot of crap music. A summary? The world didn't end, the shit fiends rejoiced, the rest of us got bleak because we were looking forward to some real excitement.

What happened, you ask, Thando? Well, mostly a loss of faith in this whole "alternative media" fallacy. Andy Davis killed Mahala, a beautiful place for a while, through a lack of business sense and you, Thando, are killing THIIIS with your lack of editorial direction. We all want to strap the "fuck you" banners to our backs, fight the good fight against brands, mediocrity, the system, the traditional media, but the sad fact is that in South Africa alternative media is kind of what punk rock has become world-wide – some gelled-up hair, empty slogans on a T-shirt and not a whole lot more. THIIIS's pages teem with such sections as "Culture" and "Reality" and "Just Life," but I must have missed the point where a photo montage of Paul Ward's average pictures from Synergy and a letter-slash-more-musings-on-the-hip-nature-of-cape-town became culture (side note: the "Politics" section has not been updated since March 2012). Mahala wanted to "interrogate" culture. THIIIS attempts something similar, and both fail to see that culture, the real fucking meat of life, lies beyond bands and designers and parties and festivals. Those are symptoms, nothing more, and both the blog-zines fell blissfully into believing that taking a firm stance against mediocrity in the entertainment industry is taking a firm stance in real life. Fools.

When you peddle in the realm of the "pop" and the "cool," you ain't fighting for anything, no matter how sharp your fangs are. And then you cry that you have no money (despite the Jew gold in one case and the black diamond gold in the other). Of course you have no cash! You aren't offering the brands with money the PR that they want but still expect them to get on board. Doomed you are. The cracks are there – less and less writing, less and less thought, more and more galleries and galleries and galleries. A collection of photos can't call anyone a cunt or

point out the bad organisation of the event. So maybe you should just drop the whole "alternative" facade and hit the big time like we-are-awesome did. Can your ego handle the fact that you are not punk rock anymore, just another sell out?

Or maybe, just maybe, now is the time to admit that visiting Swedish DJs are not South African culture? That privileged white cats from Cape Town who want to be in California and the equally privileged black kids from Joburg who want to be white kids in Cape Town are not the defining class? That we don't really know shit about our country? Maybe now is the time for violent social realism? For stories of the people that will never read Mahala or THIIIS? No glamour there, for sure. But meat? Oh yes, there is almost too much meat there and largely unexplored. You want to make a difference? Offer real edge? Go there. Send a white kid to live in a township for a month. Take some rural kids into your BEE home and let them check out your life for a week. Exile some poor brave soul to the mines for three weeks. Find out what it is really like there. Go to Atlantis near Cape Town, a place that holds the highest rate of foetal alcohol syndrome in the whole fucking world and ask the simple question: why?

Sure, you aren't going to be seeing any of that Puma money, but you will be doing something lasting, something that won't become meaningless when the next trends flip. Examples exist already – Live Mag SA, a publication aimed at the poor youth, made by poor youth, and sponsored by the Shuttleworth Foundation. What a crock of shit though, limited by corporate understandings of what can and cannot be published, what makes a story and what makes a digested politically correct and empty fart. So maybe it's time for you, dear THIIIS, with all your MTN money, to get off the trend horse and go into the dirt. You'll be poor for a long time, no doubt, but if you pull it off correctly, the money will come, not from Nike, but from big business that is slowly starting to realise the importance of apparent social consciousness. Who knows, maybe you'll matter then.

Does this answer the question?





KID CRY FREEDOM

Pelonomi Moiloa

As a kid person living in post '94 South Africa, I had these rights that claimed to brag of my freedoms. I tried not to roam Yeoville streets at ridiculous hours because it worried my parents and not because there was a national curfew. As for where I roamed, well, that was a freedom too because it was the fact that my parents wouldn't play Taxi Taxi and not a pass or a permit that prevented me from visiting the friendly folk in Brakpan. I joke, I wouldn't want to go to Brakpan. But I went to school in Saxonwold and it was during these years that my behaviour and appearance were tamed into evading disapproving looks. I now live across the railway tracks from Joburg CBD on the seventh floor of a yellow building in Braamfontein. Sounds float up off the street and into the small space that is my apartment and when I like, I can step onto my little balcony to bear witness to the sights that are the sources of the sounds. The sounds can often be attributed to the Gang of kids who have taken up residence in the street below.

Once, at about 10pm a member of the Gang stood in the centre of the road, alone, illuminated by the street lights, and repeatedly rapped, with dance moves and hand gestures, Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby" into the recorder in his cell phone (one of the others had an mp3 player, I don't know about the devices, okay?). Another time, there was commotion around 11pm as the Gang helped find the skelms who had separated a young man from his Blackberry. Once the skelms were found and caught, the Gang threw in a couple of kicks and slaps as a final measure of vigilantism and then went to bed. One Sunday, they invaded a serious-looking video shoot. They kept the company of both the men behind and in front of the camera, but most deliberately, the company of the video screen. The Shoot didn't seem to mind too much.

There's one particular little kid who always wears this red puffer jacket that reaches his mid-calf. His name is Billy and he is missing an incisor. He breakdances and crumps to music blasting from cars waiting outside the building and sometimes to a softer music only he can hear. He really thrusts his skinny frame about but I came home once to find a glue high keeping his mind from the music to hold his body static in the middle of the road.

Thrusting his open palms towards the sky, or perhaps the penthouses on the top floor, he preached about black mamas in their 4x4s. The Gang are mostly runaways aged between 13 and 16. I don't know whether it's a practised lie or malnourished street life that accounts for their small size. The average age looks about ten. Billy looks about eight. Either way they feed the pigeons every now and then and swear at Reuben's mother's lady bits plenty (an old man they share the street with). They say they are happy and it has been grinning faces that have opened my car door for me. Those faces have also asked me to rev my engine, spin my tyres and to be allowed to wash my car for what seems like nothing but conversation in return. They have told me they are hungry but they don't ask me for money.

As a figure with little attachment to an authority, when the authority no longer tends to you, how can you respect it and its rules, and how can the authority then rebuke? I feel as though the Gang may be exempt from all looming clouds of governance and expectation, except the ones they create for themselves. The idea of being so free, by society's standards, to "let go" to such an extent that I can rap alone in the middle of the street in the middle of the night, invade a shoot, play vigilante, call the street my home, the pavement my bed, be happy about it and warmly, wholeheartedly not be held accountable for the disrespect my actions show to the acceptable "norms" of society - really sounds like an exciting idea. The Gang by law shares the same rights that governed my childhood freedoms. I find myself grappling with the idea of the freedom they experience in reference to mine. I might be free of my parents' prerequisites one day, but I will never be free of a looming authority. For me, the looming authority perhaps misled my thoughts on freedom as much as it guided, loved and nurtured me. So much so that I know what it is to be without as much as to be with.

So I would probably not trade my teachers (the government maybe), my parents and what I now have for that "freedom." Given the choice, I don't think the Gang would want to either (my parents are pretty cool) but I figure the liberty associated with being an unauthorised child, without fear of disappointing society but disappointing its disapproving looks, is worth thinking about - for me at least.



The
Golfman

THE CRAFTSMAN

Andy Petersen

The wall definitely did have a hole in it, concluded Willie Ashford. He placed his hand through the gap until it was out in the passageway outside the room. He put his head through the hole and looked left and right.

There was no one there, but it definitely was a hole. To be sure, he checked his manual one last time. H came after G; that he knew for certain. But as a hint of doubt passed through his mind, he thought briefly about consulting his alphabet sheet to be sure. However, he soon thought better of the idea: he had examined the alphabet only minutes previously. He flicked through the pages. The manual was thick and thorough, covering every aspect of every facet of craftsmanship. Willie had compiled the list himself through his observations from the time when he worked as Old Man Yorkie’s assistant.

The man had taught him everything, and he’d been extra careful to write it all down. Finally, Willie reached the entry he was looking for. “Hole – a big round thing in the middle of something. Often transparent, you know.”

There was another description scribbled next to it.

“A small round thing somewhere in the middle of the greenest grass on a golf course, into which the ball is directed. Ludicrous game, golf.”

Through the hole – as Willie was almost certain it was – he could see two balls of varying sizes lying quite still in the corridor adjacent. He had thrown them earlier in varying trajectories, and every time they had flown straight through. The only problem was that he didn’t see any green grass surrounding the hole – or any grass at all for that matter. The hole quite clearly was round, though. He had taken out his protractor earlier and measured it. Three hundred and sixty degrees all the way round. He stuffed the manual back inside his bag and extracted a bottle of water with a spray cap twisted on the top. He pushed down on the top three times, wetting his hair before taking his thick-bristled comb from his pocket and sweeping the lost locks back into place.

A woman entered the room. She didn’t quite match Old Man Yorkie’s description of women, but Willie had long since learnt not to take all of his sayings at face value. She certainly wasn’t a female dog; the absence of fur and any kind of erratic tail behaviour assured him of this. In situations like these, Willie always concluded that Old Man Yorkie had either been

drunk. Or using Irish expressions, none of which had ever made sense to Willie. She had blonde hair, large breasts and seemed to be, in most of her features, womanly. He therefore concluded that she was a woman. “Well?” said the woman. She had a thick drawl of an accent, so that she drew out the four-letter word long past its usual few-second maximum. “I have concluded –” he started.

“Yeah?” she said.

He wasn’t used to being asked the same question he was answering halfway through his answer. He decided, in this case, to simply start over and speak much faster this time so that she couldn’t interrupt him.

“I have concluded that this is, in fact, a hole.”

The woman didn’t answer straight away: she seemed to be content simply staring at him, mouth slightly open, eyebrows raised.

“Is that so?” she said eventually.

“It is, ma’am. I have never spoken an untruth before, and I don’t expect to any time in the foreseeable future.”

“And you’ve spent the last two hours determining that?”

“I have, ma’am.”

“It was difficult, was it?”

“Very difficult, ma’am. I had to consult my manual numerous times and conduct countless tests before coming to my conclusion.”

“Is that so?”

Willie wasn’t sure how to answer this. He had already uttered the only response that he had to the question. He was pretty sure that if he said the same thing again, it would be repetition, and no-ones liked repetition. In the end, he said nothing, adopting his usual straight-faced, earnest expression.

She opened her mouth to speak again.

“Tell, me, er –?”

“Willie.”

“Tell me, Willie, do you consider yourself to be a good carpenter?”

“No, ma’am.”

She raised her eyebrows again.

“You don’t?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Then why do you work as one, Willie?”

“With all due respect, ma’am, I’m not a carpenter. I’m a craftsman.”

“What’s the difference?”

“A carpenter makes stuff from wood. I’m skilled in a particular art – the art of fixing things.”

“I see □ And you consider yourself to be a good craftsman?”

“Oh yes, ma’am, if I do say so. I was trained by the master – one of the best ever – Old Man Yorkie. You heard of him?”

The woman seemed to give this a moment’s consideration. Then she smiled at him.

“Yes, I have,” she said. “Got quite a reputation, don’t he?”

Willie positively beamed at this.

“You know, you’re the first person to say that in quite some time. Back in the days, me and Old Man Yorkie would walk through the streets, and everyone would greet him or lift their caps in his direction. But since he’s dead, not too many people seem to remember him.”

The woman looked at him, her head cocked ever so slightly to one side, her eyebrows drawn together. Willie continued, seemingly in the process of getting lost in his own story.

“People from all over used to come up to me and put their arm on my shoulder and say, ‘You sure are lucky to have Old Man Yorkie being your mentor.’ And I was. Some people would’ve given their right arms to learn what I learnt. He was the most famous craftsman this side of the Jukskei.”

“And he was the one who taught you how to tell what’s a hole and what’s not?”

“He sure was, ma’am.”

“He taught you well, then, because you’re absolutely right: that there is a hole.”

Another silence. Willie was still rejoicing in her acknowledgement.

“I got some spaghetti cooking in a pot: making a nice tomato sauce and everything, but I’m afraid I made too much. You wanna take a break maybe, from your craftsmanship, and have a bite to eat?”

“I gotta fix the hole,” said Willie.

“You can fix the hole later. Come have a bite to eat.”

“I gotta fix the hole.”

She paused to think.

“Okay, well, you fix the hole and while you’re doing that I’ll get the food. That alright?”

Willie nodded his head. She slipped slowly out the room. He saw her through the hole as she walked past him and then vanished. He heard the clip-clop of her high-heeled shoes as she stepped down the stairs. He turned to his tools he had laid out earlier. She had specified exactly what type of wood was needed to fill the hole and he’d duly gone out and bought it. He’d also bought the exact shade of white paint so that,

when finished, the patch-up wouldn’t stand out. The piece of wood needed to be an exact fit, so he took out his enlarged protractor and measuring stick to get the specifications. He worked at this for about five minutes before getting out his saw and beginning to cut. As he was a little beyond a quarter of the way through, he saw the woman walking past the hole and re-enter the room. In each hand was a round, white plate with a sizeable portion of spaghetti on it, and piping hot tomato sauce, and a fork. Steam whispered upwards from the dish every couple of seconds.

“Here’s your food, when you’ve got a minute.”

She put the plate next to him and then pulled out a chair for herself and sat down on it. Willie had broken a sweat making sure that he didn’t cut even a centimetre too deep into the wood and so decided he’d take a short rest. He placed both the wood and the saw on the floor and sat cross-legged next to them. He picked up the plate, placed it on his lap, held the fork in his right hand and proceeded to twirl as many strands as could fit between the teeth of the fork so that not one piece protruded outwards. He raised the utensil to his mouth and chewed for an appropriate number of times until the food was ground enough to swallow without clogging his throat’s passageway. Willie was wondering if he should consult his manual to see what it said about spaghetti-eating procedure and if he’d left anything out when he caught sight of the woman and lost his train of thought.

There were certain days when Old Man Yorkie had been unusually sentimental. On these days, the advice he gave stretched far beyond the realms of craftsmanship. One such day, he had spoken about beauty. Willie had been keen to write it down, but Old Man Yorkie had firmly instructed him not to in this case. He said that either Willie would remember, in which case there’d be no need to write it down, or he’d forget, in which case it probably wasn’t that important. Well, Willie had clean forgotten what he’d said that day and therefore knew nothing on the matter. And yet, he seemed still to have some sort of sense of what beauty was – and if his sense was right, then this woman was beautiful. She had finished her food. Willie swallowed his first mouthful, looked back down at his plate, and went for another. She stood up and paced over to the wall that Willie was currently fixing. She ran her hand right the way around the edge of the hole, slowly, tracing its perfection.

“Tell me, Willie,” she said. “How exactly did you know this was a hole?” Willie swallowed his mouthful immediately upon hearing her voice, which clogged his throat slightly. When he spoke, it came out more as a croak. “I have a manual – compiled from years of Old Man Yorkie’s teachings. He told me exactly what a hole was and I wrote it down. That’s how I could tell.”

Deeming it necessary, Willie reached over for his bag and fished out the manual once again. He held it up to her and she took it. As she flipped through its pages, she whistled.

“This book has everything in it.”

“It sure does,” he replied, and then he remembered the absence of beauty, and said, “Well, almost everything.”

She placed the book back down on the floor and stared through the hole again.

“You wanna know how I knew it was a hole?”

Willie nodded.

“The person who cut it told me. He said, ‘I’m gonna cut me a hole in this wall and take it with me so that you’ll never forget that I left’. I guess he didn’t count on the fact that we have some pretty skilled craftsmen up in this town.”

Silence. She stared through the hole in the wall and he absentmindedly twirled himself another forkful of spaghetti. Before he put it to his mouth, he said:

“If you don’t mind me saying, ma’am, he must’ve been a full-blown lunatic to have left you.”

She turned from the hole to face him and smiled.

“That’s real sweet of you,” she said.

He flushed red-hot at the intensity of her gaze and raised the fork to his mouth once again to try and cover it up. She seemed to notice but said nothing, walking, instead, to pick up her plate and then leave the room.

As she passed the hole, she said, “I’ll be back soon.”

As he heard her shoes step off the last stair, he took to finishing his spaghetti.

When that was done, he set the plate aside and went back to fixing the hole.

He picked up his saw again and started to carve the edges. He worked much faster now, and he had the circle cut out within the next five minutes. He then started attaching and gluing it to the wall until it fit perfectly. This took twenty minutes, and after that time there was no sign of the woman. He proceeded to paint the patch on both sides so

that it fit in completely and was hardly distinguishable from the rest of the wall. It was now 25 minutes after she had left. She said she’d “be back soon.” Willie knew that this was just a manner of speaking, but he did think that 25 minutes exceeded the outer boundaries of the term “soon:” he was sure the manual would validate that thought.

He packed his things together, placed them by the wall and picked up his bag. His job was finished, but he didn’t feel it time to leave yet. He usually departed the moment his work was done, but for some reason he felt compelled to stay a while longer. He stood leaning against the wall opposite the now non-existent hole, the string of his bag hanging off his middle finger.

Without thinking too much, he pulled out the manual once more and flipped through the pages. Like a magnet, his fingers were immediately drawn to the letter K and then to the word “Kiss.” Old Man Yorkie had had a lot to say on the matter so Willie’s writings on it exceeded two pages. Willie had never before found any reason to read up on it before, and so he moved his eyes tentatively along, each word he read adding to his mortification.

It started out with, “A touch of the lips.” The next entry read, “A clever trick designed by nature to fill the space when words become superfluous.” Neither of these, he thought, seemed to help very much. “What’re you looking up?” came the woman’s voice.

As Willie looked up to see her, he gave a silent shriek of fright and dropped the manual. It hit the ground, open on the page he’d left it, with a thud. He backed away from it slowly and she moved forwards, picking it up and moving her eyes across the pages. There was only one entry on both the pages before her, the one he’d been looking up, and so there was little doubt as to what he had consulted the manual for.

A different smile made its way onto her lips now. Willie couldn’t describe exactly what it was or what it meant, but it made his heart race even faster. A laugh escaped from her mouth. Willie couldn’t see anything funny about what had happened. The only time Old Man Yorkie had laughed at nothing was when he’d been drunk. Willie concluded she must be too.

“Now tell me, Willie. Why on earth were you looking up this particular word?”

Willie stood still, unspeaking, unflinching. Inside, however, a completely

different story was unfolding. Thoughts passed through his head that he didn’t understand.

“Did you look up the word because another part of the book made you look it up?”

He shook his head. He had done it entirely of his own will.

“And did you find anything in here that might be useful?”

Again, he shook his head. He most certainly had not.

She felt in her pockets and pulled out a cigarette and lighter. She put the cigarette to her mouth, lit it, and, with the same flame, set one of the corners of the book alight. As Willie saw the first hint of orange and the first cough of smoke as the edge was gobbled up, everything inside and outside of him stopped. He felt nothing. As the flame slowly started to gather, the woman opened the window on the street-facing side of the room and threw the manual out of it. He didn’t hear it drop over the sound of the traffic outside.

The woman sidled slowly up to him.

“You don’t need a book to tell you what a hole is,” she said. “And you don’t need a book to tell you how to kiss a woman.”

“Old Man Yorkie –” Willie heard himself mutter.

“I was probably a very wise man,” said the woman, cutting in. “But some things you need to figure out for yourself.”

She was now only inches from him. He tried to back away, but he was leaning against the wall and could go no further. She took a drag of her cigarette, blew the smoke out of the side of her mouth and then planted a short, gentle kiss on his lips. As she drew her head back, she smiled again, a third, unique smile, and fished some money out of her pockets. “Here,” she said. “Ten rand an hour times by three hours equals 30 rand.” He took the money from her hand and put it in his pocket. “Thanks for this,” she said, gesturing towards her wall. “If I ever need a hole fixed again, I’ll let you know. And if you ever need help deciphering just what a hole is, you let me know.”

He nodded and walked out the door. As he passed the now patched-up hole, he waved at her, knowing that she couldn’t see him, but doing so anyway. He descended the stairs, exited the house through the front and walked over to his pickup truck. As he drove away, his tires rode over and extinguished the last remaining embers of his craftsman’s manual.



the
brother ^{in the} FRIDGE
and the possibilities
of WEIRD

THE BROTHER IN THE FRIDGE AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF WEIRD Molemo Moiloa

I turned to my sister and asked her how she would describe this event. She used one word: weird. She’s right, The Brother Moves On is weird and so were most of the members of the ever-increasing pool of groupies who gathered on the Drill Hall rooftop on Saturday evening to, along with me, croon “ubuthi uyahamba” with Mr Gold, that haunting cry that represents all that’s weird about this place. I first saw TBMO about a year ago, though I have known some of the band members for much longer. They were performing at Kospotong Newtown. I remember the music being pretty good but I mostly remember very vivid flashes of gold out-of-this-world-tight leggings wrapped around man-legs, gyrating on top of a mic stand. Like my sis said: weird. TBMO describe themselves as a collaborative performance piece and “the ghost inside the magic, the stranglers of an innocent idea bringing performance art to its knees through music and storytelling.” I think “weird” sums it up pretty well.

And why not. We live in a real weird place and time. And TBMO captures, ingests and vomits back a beautiful cacophony of what it sees in the mirror, its reflection and the reflection of its environment. We live in a city where cows are slaughtered at the taxi rank and cows are metamorphosised into iskopo in its basements. As many people sleep in the streets of the city as work in its banks. The cops stand in the middle of the road, completely ignoring the fully functional traffic lights and insist people drive when the light is red. We play in Melville, eat in Addis town, blom in Kensington, vakashela koThembisa, and school in the city centre – and everyone is different in each place and we must be too. We’ve emerged from a time of turgid violence and fierce cleavages and in some weird rainbow-coloured swoosh we are all friends. We have extreme poverty, which faces us, black plastic bag in hand, at every robot we stop at. But just as ubiquitously, giant vehicular mounds of money cruise about with rich ass drivers who wear extortionately-priced belt buckles and hater (or black plastic bag holder) blockers. And where better to manifest this craziness than the Drill Hall rooftop. Run by the Keleketla! Library, where kiddies – safe and supported – do their homework by

day, the rooftop is an island in a sea of constant chaos, an island from which one may not deny the city, but might pretend for a bit that it is your friend. The Drill Hall roof by night is my favourite place in Jozi, coming in just ahead of wedding spotting at the Emmerentia rose gardens – a newly-developed pastime. From the rooftop one might gaze up at the thousands of multi-coloured lit windows, presences of people and lives and families and the array of possible curtain colours open to the average city dweller. From these windows often stands the shadowy presence of a person peering down onto the rooftop, a voyeur who can see you, but is an anonymous figure from up on high, unaccountable to your gaze. These glowing coloured lights, better than any Christmas tree, and their shadowy inhabitants tower above you and remind you that, frankly, in the bigger scheme of things, you ain’t shit, and life goes on regardless. And below, if you peer over the wall you look into the streets, always alive with people and action. Night or day, people go on, doing stuff.

They are closer, and now you are the voyeur and from this position you can reclaim an ounce of ownership of the streets and your ability to (literally) rise above them. From here you can contemplate the daily happenings of an inner city street. You can watch from your position of self-claimed security the fears and dreams that walk the streets. In fact, on this night in question we watched people play soccer, firefighters jump out of their truck and stream into the building across the road and, at the end of the night, police on the corner with chevron tape demarcating what must have been the scene of some relatively serious crime. C’est la Jozi. But unperturbed, on our island cloud of super alternative artsy vibes, Rambling Bones. The Fridge and TBMO, not to mention a number of DJs, contributed their sounds to the night. And the on-purpose-weird crowds of half shaved, multi-coloured hairdos and super indie outfits – made out of your mom and your dad’s 80s wardrobe that you once teased them about, cut up with buttons added, of course – danced and sang along in cool and alternative bliss.

I had heard Rambling Bones was a three-man band but what we were presented with was effectively a two-person guitar band that plays a kind of folk-dipping-into-soft-rock sorta sound with a completely unassuming frontman who you wouldn’t look at twice walking through your average neighbourhood suburban shopping mall, and a sweet singing lady who, other than instrumentals, adds a soprano cherry to the apex, making good songs. Really good songs. The songwriting is strong, though the

impromptu noises that are sometimes emitted from the main guy’s throat can be a little disturbing to what are otherwise powerfully simple arrangements. These are good sounds and I’d suggest you check them out on ramblingbones.com. I had been to a few gigs hoping to see The Fridge and had never actually had the pleasure (too many gigs start hours later than they’re supposed to!) so I was stoked when I heard Sam’s super-smooth, pure pleasure voice. I had only ever heard them on reverbnation.com, and I’m pleased to say they are just as good live. A good build on the chilling sounds of Rambling Bones, The Fridge swept the crowd up in their mesmerising jazz, neo-blues sound, managing to get the crowd in as backup singers for the three-man band. Sam’s super hot scatting was totally on point, and I think we can safely say that the move from a cappella turf to the domain of the instrument wasn’t a bad one at all. Ade on the drums was slight and nuanced and had a few people around me going a little crazy. 2C on the guitars was smooth, too. I think I can safely say I am a groupie and will stave off sleep the next time they perform at three or four in the morning.

But it was that moving brother that everyone had come to see and the crowd stood up and moved in a little closer on the rallying call of “ubuthi uyahamba.” Seriously, it seeps into your spine and sits there like cold water. I don’t know how to describe TBMO’s sound so I’m not really going to try. But they are more of an experience, particularly with the addition of the Stash the Suitcase Collective, who add various elements to the performance, including video. TBMO is made of Mr Gold, in shorts rather than gold tights this time, Facecontrol, Makongela, Cami Scoundrel (though I haven’t seen her play with them for a little while), Burnslow and SnyMalema (who I’m pretty sure I used to know by another name, but you know how it is).

They refer to their sound as “echoing the great tradition of storytelling using music as a medium of tying the traditional to the contemporary. The music can be described as post folk rock genre of Afrique indie kids who boldly claim their heritage as part of a transition generation in South Africa.” I think this is pretty apt. What TBMO represent are the shifts, remakes and schizophrenia that make us really ugly and really beautiful at the same time. But standing back from the whole thing I couldn’t help but watch this display of weird, and wonder what indie really has to offer. Does this performative reflection of how young people exist in their

environment help us navigate anything? In the midst of other like-minded people there may be some understanding, but can ordinary people who are just trying to cope with their normal really relate to what TBMO are doing? What does this kind of subculture contribute to a cultural discourse?

I think this is difficult to quantify, and if we tried we’d probably feel a little despondent. But regardless, I like what TBMO do. I like what The Brother in the Fridge was. What they do is really brave. And actually the ranks are growing. With the likes of L8 Antique, Impande Core and other cultural spaces (new skate parks, music venues, exhibition spaces) that facilitate this kind of exploration, there seems to be wider scope to find your place when perhaps normal seems a little like a farce. I think it’s a good idea to say it like it is, to embrace the crazy and the weird, to make one’s own sense of it, particularly if, as TBMO say, you “boldly claim [your] heritage as part of a transition generation in South Africa.” What else can be expected of a generation of young people swimming through the rainbow-coloured chaos, than gyrating in glowing gold tights? I didn’t make it through to the end, but people did remain to watch the sunrise. I was beaten by my lack of preparation for the cold at I am, felt a bit like the sister in the freezer. On leaving I felt that, while this kind of gig happens in these secret spaces in the sky, somewhat removed from a lot of people, there was some addition to the schemes of normalcy happening here.

The Brother in The Fridge represents a few words added to the novel that is our contemporary space. It was also the opportunity for bands and DJs exploring new sounds and identities to hook up and do this thing together, and that’s super-cool, too. And while I have followed The Brother Moves On anyway (they also keep getting better and better), and knew I liked The Fridge, this gig has got me committing to some groupie love on an artistic level, but also for the cause. Weird for president.



STAR CARD

cool kids Don't need vowels

STR CRD - COOL KIDS DON'T NEED VOWELS

Pelonomi Moiloa

I started carrying my stuff around in a backpack as a young teenager at high school socials. It specifically hung low over my bottom to brazen out opportunistic grinders and their attempts to take advantage of my booty. As I have progressed through my teenage years I have not yet come up with a more polite solution. I thought this habit of mine might prove to be problematic as I approached my twenties because I would most likely have to be more serious and things – my mother keeps reminding me that my stripy backpack is not the most serious of things.

But I went to STR CRD last week Saturday and everyone was carrying backpacks (I am being a little biased in my exaggeration). Apparently the density of opportunistic grinders and polite peoples has increased throughout all ages and across both genders. So in the world in which I am concerned, I am shup for now.

STR CRD was really quite wonderful in that it created an environment which allowed its attendees not to be conventionally serious and things – which made you wonder where its attendees hid for the rest of the year. That fashion mob explains the inflation in numbers of charity stores. It was beautiful. Tribal prints, collared shirts, docs and brogues, hair, hats and fitted caps in every pattern, hue and dimension pasted tumblr across every second person's forehead. Of course not everyone went for the look of the second-hand. There were people wearing cufflinks that cost more than what I pay for rent. It was an event certainly more for the fashion-oriented, both in interest and appearance, and most certainly a gathering of Cool Kids.

Unfortunately, everyone was so cool that I felt cold at the disconnection. That same type of disconnection I experience when someone insists on being so à la mode that I am required to have a conversation with the reflection in their shades. So much so that when one of about ten little people, between the age of about three and six, fell off a promotional wooden block, no one felt obliged enough to wipe away her tears or help her press a tissue to the bloody spots appearing on the back of her head. Not even the nine other little people. Almost as if the cold had told everyone not to. Well, it was either that or the Cool Kids were being sour for having to pay R150 when the little people got in for free. So she half-stumbled, half-wandered around in the dark with tears streaming down her face, her little hand held to her head and her mouth ajar with exaggerated sad sounds coming out of it.

That was quite a contrast to the jam of mutual union Adidas was making

of the space next door. Declaring a blatant disregard for social standing, Adidas welcomed everyone (within the parameters of the event, of course) to their secluded asylum and then plied their guests with complimentary alcohol. Not only that but they offered a pair of sneakers, most miniature, to the successful side of a game of Ching-Chong-Cha and they had these pink poodle sneakers on display which had me giggling for a good ten minutes. They made me very happy (:

Yes, Adidas made me very happy, as did Converse and its truck of fantastic shoes in fantastic cages and fantastic bicycle carts that they let me ride. Amongst other things, I found absolute pleasure in a really great steak roll, the expression on the face of a friend in reaction to the size of the cups the alcohol was served in, and when I watched a young man try and ride the BMX ramps of yet more little people (it looked a little like a lady trying to get a troop of monkeys out of her kitchen). This wasn't long after the BMX-ers themselves had made a mockery of my bike-riding skills, but I enjoyed that too.

I was a little uncomfortable at the subtle display of economic apartheid, though. STR CRD, having been held on the outskirts of the "perilous" Johannesburg inner city, made me feel like I was in a game reserve. The neighbourhood came out to sit on the other side of the fence marking STR CRD's parameters to watch the strange-looking Cool Kids who had the nerve to block off Commissioner Street (a main road into the city centre). I felt my presence was almost mocking the deprived environs I would leave behind after I was done "playing." But hey, the neighbourhood also got to see The Brother Moves On, Pro, Just A Band, Jessie Boykins and PH Phat, and though they may not have understood the spectacle they had witnessed, they still seemed to have had a good time.

I'm not quite sure what I expected from STR CRD but I needed something more. I found myself bouncing around waiting for things to start – waiting for the start of an event that had been going on for the past three days. Perhaps that was the problem, that I expected the feel of the past three days to be experienced in a couple of hours. My excited fidgeting gradually turned into what was more of an agitated twitch that Saturday. Either way, I can't say I won't be back next year. Even if it's just to watch the Backpackers and the Cool Kids, to look at sneakers, and laugh at the little people.







Vimba

VIMBA: IN DEFENCE OF REAL FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Molemo Moiloa

The city is abuzz during the day – thousands of people everywhere, noise blasting out of taxis and storefronts and vendors' stalls, crazy traffic and streets filled with people, vegetables, illegal DVDs and shoes direct from China. But at night it clears. Few people walk the streets, the shops have rolled down their shutters, and people have taken the long trek back across apartheid-constructed geographies and populate the nights of the townships instead.

A few night vendors dot corners, there are a number of taverns, the 24-hour Spar and the late-night rank on the corner of Jeppe and Joubert. Music might sound from a car driving past, the whistle of a rubbish collector stringing from the back of the van. That's all there is. And so mostly it's silent.

In the middle of the night, when most people are asleep, there is almost no sound to be heard from my flat on the 16th floor, way above the scurrying of the rats in the streets and the shuffled feet of security guards trying to stay awake.

But sometimes, through the cold silence, comes a cry. It travels icily, like a spectre, cutting through the dark air. It's ominous. A sign of mob justice in the day, but a decibel of total isolation at night. "VIMBA," comes the cry, long and drawn-out at first. Determined, ardent. And then repeated. More staccato this time. When the victim realises he is alone.

I lie awake in my bed. My eyes open and are flitting between the white ceiling and the blaring lights that are the city night that stream through my window. I hold my breath, waiting for other sounds. The amassed sounds of other people, signalling a chase, a possible encounter. Sometimes they come. Mostly they don't. And I imagine this man, or woman, in the dark, empty streets of Johannesburg city, walking dejected, a little shaken, but happy to still have passed the test of full functioning of his vocal chords, not to mention his heart: and I imagine that he looks up at my window or perhaps at another of the blocks of flats around me that clearly have warm, sleepy bodies in them. I wonder if he knows I heard his cry.

This cry for Vimba lies with me like a heavy blanket folded a few times over my legs and my chest. It lies with me for most of that night, and it remains with me as I walk the same streets on my way to work the next morning – the sun having chased the shadows away, the people having

returned. It lingers as little bits of multi-coloured glitter perch in my spine. Uncomfortable, almost painful, but kind of pretty and a symbol of very real violence.

Somehow day-time Vimba does not affect me in the same way. I think because I know it is usually accompanied by a high-speed chase, of one panicked animal at the front with his heartbeat in his ears, and a marauding crowd of men and women, youngest in front, bearing down on his heels with squeals in their voices and a manic sparkle in their eyes. I know it most often results in a ferocious beat-down of whoever was running at the front, his heartbeat pounding through his ears as he gets kicks to his ribcage and boots at his head from a crowd of strangers who care not about his name. And I would rather block this from my mind: I'm pretty successful with that thing called denial.

But night-time Vimba largely ends with the call. Obviously not for the dude who got jumped, who now has a long walk ahead of him, regaining all the phone numbers he just lost. But as far as a public outcry for justice goes, it dies as the sound waves melt into the darkness and cosy in with the homeless asleep on Plein Street. And because it's not overwhelming by its ugly sister Lady Vigilantism, it stands out as a rather extraordinary thing. This call, this plea to the strangers about you, this request for community, for back-up, for "a shield." A cry that reflects a desperation at our current inability to control that thing we call crime. A cry that signals a recognition of the loss of the individual's ability to control his environment, to maintain his isolation, to go it alone.

And in light of all this freedom of expression talk lately, with this drama over Our Honourable Mr President's umthondo, I got to really thinking about the power of voice, of expression and of where and when it brings effect.

What is the purpose of the freedom to express yourself when it isn't spoken to a wider audience? How free is your speech, really, if you aren't able to surrender its power and its meaning to a public that might respond and also might not? Or might respond in a way that doesn't suit you?

Vimba is the model for the ultimate free speech. It is speech that comes from a place, not of opinion, or self-righteous indignation, but from a real fact. It is speech that doesn't laud its speaker, act as a symbol of how smart or powerful that speaker is, but rather recognises how simplistic individualism is when facing the real world, and submits to collectivism. It is speech that requests the action of one's peers, rather than the passive and pompous act of sarcastic and self-indulgent "intellectual analysis." It

is not speech that defends its right to exist regardless of its relevance, but asks for engagement, requests input. I'm not pro-vigilantism, let me just get that straight. And I think mob justice is a complex and problematic thing that requires in-depth discussion to really understand. But I do think us young'uns could learn a thing or two from the principle of how it starts, not how it ends. And I think we need to consider how we defend "free speech" and what responsibilities we take with our voices – in defence of free speech, but also the responsibility to keep your mouth shut if you're not gonna say it right.



Illustrations [Sindiso Nyoni]



the
YOUTH
is
DARK
and full of
BULLSHIT
BULLSHIT

THE YOUTH IS DARK AND FULL OF BULLSHIT

Max Barashenkov

Until a sixteen-year-old drapes himself in the green, yellow and black of the ANC and sets himself on fire in front of Luthuli House, Youth Day will remain, as it has since the early 2000s, just another day when you don't have to go to work.

Days like these, they were implemented back when there was something to honour in the vigour of youthful rebellion, back when students thought and questioned and raised fists, back when Soweto 1976 shook the country, back when student riots in France in 1968 brought the economy to its knees, back when we could be heroes. Now, these days are merely reminders of our moral obesity.

A day to commemorate the events of June 16 1976? What a goddamn joke it has become. Show me a person under 30 who says they truly care about what this day is meant to mean, and I'll show you a liar. We all have other things to worry about. Like Father's Day, which this year fell on the same day and received a lot more airtime on the social media networks. The white middle class kids, well, we never really had anything to fight for in this country, so forgive us if dubstep and keeping up appearances are more important. The newly rich black kids? They are too busy popping bottles, having their drivers chauffeur them from compound to compound, or trying to wash away the beginnings of Black Diamond guilt through irrelevant blogs. The poor black kids? They are perhaps the most true to the spirit of 1976 – no one cared about them then and no one cares about them now. They just want to be rich black kids anyway. High ideals and global drive are no longer.

We aren't stupid: we'll give ourselves that. We know that shit is fucked on a monumental scale, but why would we risk raising banners, erecting barricades, throwing rocks and huffing tear gas, when we can sign a Facebook petition, with one click of a button – not only saving the world, but also showing everyone that we are doing so? Which is probably more important. The one problem, we've realised, with old-school protests, riots and wildcat strikes is that you can never really be photographed clearly and without that, how will the people know that you were there, that you did your bit? Who wants to be a faceless figure in a balaclava throwing a Molotov?

Where is the individuality in that?

Can you really blame us for our apathy, though? Time and time again we've been shown that real change, real restructuring of the systems put in place by the fathers of our fathers, is just not possible. We can change names, change ruling parties, invent such farces as the Rainbow Nation, but the reality remains the same: we don't matter until we swallow the blue pill and join the working ranks on terms that essentially bind us to what was before, for life. Did the hippies achieve anything in the 60s? Some loosening of morals and vaginas, an increase in civil liberties, but on the whole – not much. Soweto 1976? Lots of hype, lots of that "raised awareness" that on its own has never resolved anything. It didn't end apartheid, just made things a little grittier, a little more brutal. Did Occupy Wall Street end in anything more than some bankers spitting down from the high-rises as the police cleared away the protestors who couldn't even figure out what they wanted in the first place? Doomed we are from the start and the fact that Youth Day went by largely unnoticed is a sad testament to that.

So where to from here? Who knows? Those who think they know, they will write crappy rants that no one will read. Those who want to know, they never will because no structures exist for them to acquire such knowledge. And those who don't want to know – they will be the happiest of them all.



IMITHINTELO YENKULULEKO YEZINTU

Sibusisiwe Maseko

Inkqubo yezizwe zesiNtu iboniswa njani kule mihla? Asisanxibi iimpahla zesiNtu imihla ngemihla, namasiko ethu asisawahloniphi. Into eyodwa esingayithatha siyisebenzise kwikamva lethu ziilwimi zethu. Ezi lwimi lilifa esingalishiyela abantwana bethu xa singasaphili. Iilwimi zethu zibonisa inkcubeko yethu – zisahlula kwezinye izizwe. Ukuba sifuna uMzantsi Afrika uphumelele, kufuneka sikhuthaze iilwimi zethu ukuba zisetyenziswe ngokufanelekileyo ezikolweni, eziyunivesithi nakwiindawo zomsebenzi.

Ulwimi yenye yezinto ebalulekile kwinkqubo yesizwe sethu. Ukuba singalahla iilwimi zethu sizolibala ubuntu bethu nendlela yokuphila ngokwesintu. Siyalibala ukuba ulwimi luquka amasiko nezithethe zesizwe sethu. Ungahlonipha njani amasiko ukuba akuwazi amagama asetyenziswa emcimbini? Ungabuqonda njani ubuhle nobumnandi bombongo ukuba awuyinqondi intsingiselo yamagama asetyenziswa ukuzoba umfanekiso wombongo Ubuhle beelwimi zesintu buyalityalwa ngokuba asisathathi ixesha ukuzixabisa nokuzihlonipha. Isininzi sabantwana abazalwa emva kwenkululeko yethu abasathethi iilwimi zesintu. Sixelelwa ukuba olona lwimi luza kusinika impumelelo sisiNgesi. Nangoku, abazali bakhuthaza abantwana babo ukuba bafunde isiNgesi esikolweni. Andiphikisi ukuba isiNgesi lulwimi lomhlaba wonke. Kodwa, ukuba asizami ukulondoza iilwimi zethu, ezo zinto ezahlula isizwe sethu kwezinye izizwe, zizolahlekelwa ngamasiko, izithethe, inkcubeko nobuntu bethu.

Ndiyabona ukuba abantwana benkululeko bayathambekela kwingcinga yokuba abazali bethu bebelwela inkululeko ngokusinika ithuba lokuba siye ezikolweni ezilungileyo, nokuhlala ezindaweni ezilungileyo ,nokuphila ubomi obugcwele ezo zinto bona bangazange bakwazi ukuzifumana ebomini babo. Nabazali bam babefuna loo nto. Kodwa, zange bacinge ukuba ukuphila obu bomi obukhululekileyo kwakuthetha ukuthi kwakufuneka ndiyilibale imvelaphi yam.

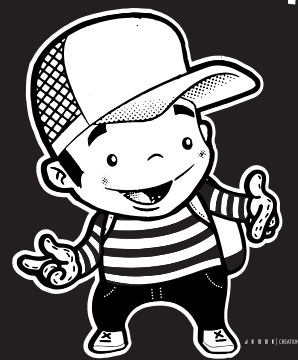
Kufuneka sicacise ngokucacileyo ukuba sifuna libe njani na ikamva loMzantsi Afrika, nendima nendawo yeelwimi zethu kuwo. Ukuba siqhubeka kule ndlela sikuyo ngoku, sizobona isizwe sethu sitshintsha siyene iMelika. Kufuneka sizisebenzise ngamandla nangokukhuthaleyo iilwimi zethu, sizifunde yaye zifundiswe ukuze zibonise ukutshintsha imo yesizwe sethu. Ukuba singayenza lo nto, soze siyilibale inkcubeko namasiko ethu.

IMITHINTELO ye *Nkululeko* yeziNtu





“nigga, what’s wrong
with you? how do you
try to rip me off?”



MPHO THE MIDGET

Bogosi Sekhukhuni

i had just missed the 32. or rather, it hadn't come. bus drivers are moody, fat pirates. there's a bumper sticker that says, "if taxi drivers are the adolescent rebellious teens of the transport universe, then bus drivers are uniformed spoilt brats bent on leaving you behind."

of course, no such bumper sticker exists but i found myself wandering the joburg city streets late one night after waiting in vain for an absent bus. my fury at a wasted two hours at a cold wits bus stop was dampened by an interesting encounter with a girl. she bummed a cigarette off me, although i'm pretty sure she didn't smoke. we quickly got around to that part of the conversation where she said she liked dick and i affirmed that i liked pussy. we exchanged numbers and said our goodbyes. perhaps absent buses are what's needed for joburg kids to talk to each other. perhaps the scent of the night sky is a suitable agent for letting loose middle-class inhibitions and snobbiness.

i made my way to the taxi rank on delvers and got into the last taxi, snugly fitting myself in a back row seat. a red light from a shop sign outside flooded through the taxi window. the taxi seats glowed a peculiar red, and as i contemplated this, a short fellow boarded the taxi and sat next to me.

there's a particular body language to taking taxis in this city. ekhuruleni and east rand taxi drivers, unlike their colleagues who travel to the south in those regal quantum buses, still use the old iconic toyota sixteen-seater buses and have no trouble finding creative ways to transform a sixteen-seater into noah's ark. adding to their qualifications as shrewd drag racers and sharp street mathematicians, taxi drivers are amateur engineers often reconfiguring the seating plan of a taxi. welded seats and the miscalculated narrow gaps between them are evidence of this. (doors are mechanical nightmares taxi drivers have yet to master.)

this stranger sat down next to me and struck up a conversation.

"so, you're a graphic designer?"

i looked down and replied, "no, i study visual art."

he nodded and an awkward silence followed.

"myself, i'm an assessor, you see," he flatly announced.

the ghost of a smile flashed across my face. he was determined to have this conversation.

"really?" i replied, "what exactly is that?"

an assessor, as it turns out, is a person whose job it is to analyse insurance claim cases. assessors are employed by insurance brokers, and banks like ABSA in the case of my talkative fellow passenger, to investigate insurance claims and determine the validity of a claim.

"what? do people try to cheat the system?" i casually asked.

"my man! you wouldn't believe how much people like money!" he exclaimed.

no shit.

(it is three weeks later. i have bumped into him twice since our first dreamy encounter. i say "bump into" because although he had expressed an interest in staying in touch, and hanging out as boys do, i had reservations and pretended to have lost my phone or muttered something like, "no man, school's killing me right now." he got over me quickly. wasn't too impressed when i borrowed money from him to take a taxi to work and didn't insist on paying it back. his eyes said to me, "nigga, what's wrong with you? how do you try to rip me off?")

he related a story to me about a group of people who would come together over the body of a dead relative, plant the body in a car and stage a car accident hoping to be able to claim a payment. he had found himself an attentive audience in me as well as, i'm sure, the shy attention of neighbouring passengers in the quiet taxi. he told me that he was still in training but that he was "loving the job."

it was at this point that i noticed something peculiar about my mysterious new friend who appeared to me in the red light, something that, in the shadow of a taxi backseat, gradually became apparent:

he was a midget. and just about the most confident midget i'd ever come across. my prejudice exposed, i reasoned to myself that i had actually never met a midget before. (and why is that? "where do all the midgets hang out?" a friend would later ask me.) not only was he a midget, as our conversation somehow turned philosophical (we spoke about marijuana and dying), i looked at him more closely as he expressed himself with hand gestures and realised that, out of the usual ten fingers, the mysterious assessor only had four, evenly spread out on both hands – the thumb and index.

Those short, stubby digits moved with a fiery, absentminded defiance. they seemed to be instinctively shaped like hooks. a silver ring gripped

the index finger on his right hand. i felt strange watching him talk, as if somehow i had smoked some of the grass he professed to love. we got off at the same stop, said our goodbyes, and exchanged numbers.

"what's your name?"

"Bogosi"

"sho, nna ke Mpho"

Mpho the midget.

(i want to use him more than be his actual friend. is that bad? artists are generally interested in watching society and creating magical phantom impersonations of that society. sometimes these phantoms are deconstructed and loaded with meaning. i'm interested in watching artists watch everybody else ... is that a pompous glare? was that a self-righteous roll of the eye? what does it mean to be inspired?)





LIBERALS TO LET

LIBERALS TO LET

Zara Julius

Whilst walking up Lower Main after watching The Buccaneers draw Tottenham, a busted-up car blasts its horn, illuminating one of Obs's local homeless children. Dominating the road with a bow-and-arrow, he lifts his stance, narrows his gaze, and aims at the oncoming vehicle. The car skids and swerves:

“JOU MA SE...”

Heads turn half-heartedly and the usual drunken affairs persist. You see, these scenes are common on the strip of Somali-owned cafes scattered amongst Asian diners, sleazy bars to which we're all too loyal, and the ever-increasing vacant shop windows.

Assegai in hand, the figure agilely ambles across the road. "Hello girlies!" We keep walking, our gazes fixed on the tar. "You're looking very beautiful this evening, m'ladies... May I please steal a moment of your time and introduce myself properly?"

The kid has swag and a copy-cat charisma. Meet Calvin. His mother died when he was young, his father is in jail for who-knows-what-crime, and now he washes cars and sells whatever he can (steal) to pay for a bed and a meal in the shelter, and probably the odd fix. It's pretty much the typical story to which we've all become desensitised. Walking alongside us with a gangsta crip in his step, Calvin divulges his story (which undoubtedly has his own embellishments accumulated over the twelve years of his life) in a surprisingly blas tone, asking for no sympathy, and showing a complete sense of acceptance.

We gather the last bits of change we can find.

"Here you go brother, it's all we have."

He insists on handing us each a ruler in his desire to uphold a "fair trade."

"Dr so-and-so & Associates Dental Surgeon: root canal, tooth whitening, fillings etc." ...And that's when guilt spits all over my budding evening. In no way am I trying to promote my virtue or compassion. Christ, "It's all I have." How many times have we said that? In fact it's really quite the opposite.

We've all heard the tired term "white guilt" that is thrown around with much carelessness in our country. Perhaps that is a contentious topic of discussion for another article, but instead I'm going to openly declare my pathetically transparent layers of middle-class baggage. Don't deny the fact that you have it too, this middle class guilt, the urge to publicise protestations of pseudo socio-economic and political liberalism.

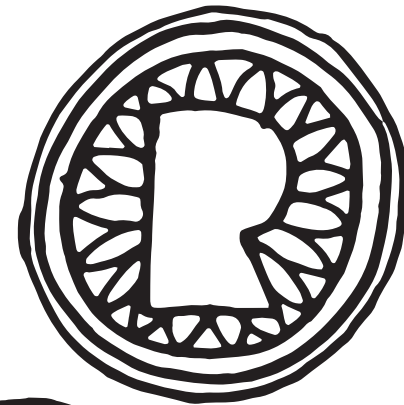
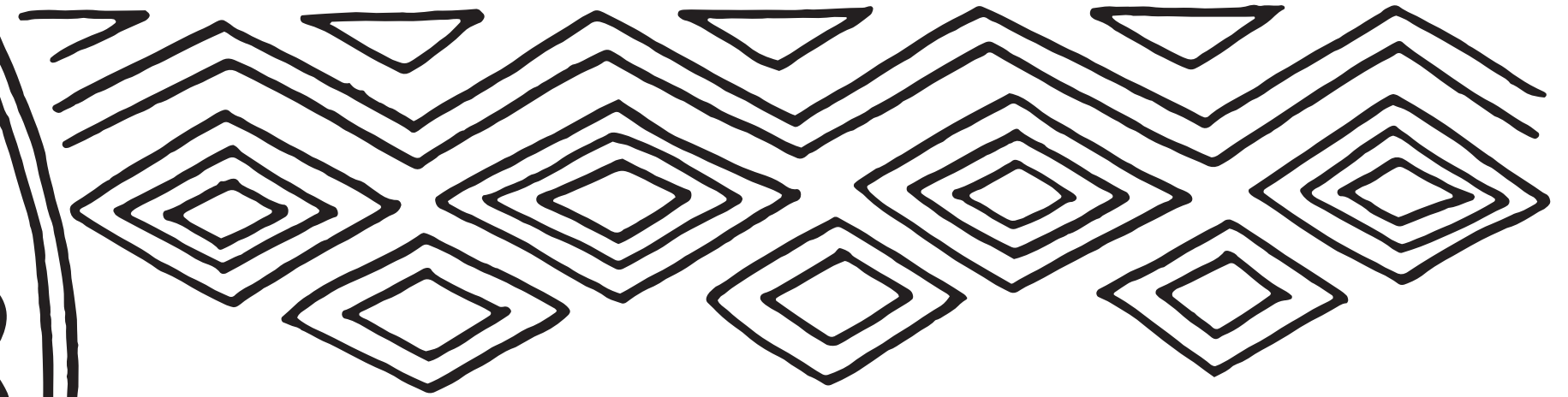
Scrolling through Facebook profiles, almost everyone's political views are marked "liberal" just to cover their bases. Truth is, being a liberal is boring! It's more than rocking up in Joburg's CBD at Market on Main on a Sunday morning. It's more than taking the odd kombi taxi and promoting your great feat ... and it should be more than hopping on a bus filled with American exchange students every second week to tutor needy children in Gugulethu or Nyanga. To say that "it's a start" and that "it's better than nothing" is not enough for me. We need to do something more with the middle class status, this sort of monthly-menstruation of liberalism – wiping the blood of shame off our hands. If anything, this is what Shaun Johnson referred to as a "sensible liberal." There's very little sensible about it.

Why is there a reluctance to use our clout? Why do we shy away from "the radical"? Blame my cynicism on history, but it seems this term "liberalism" has become just like the vacant Obs shop window. To Let for convenience sake.

OLD CASH MONEY

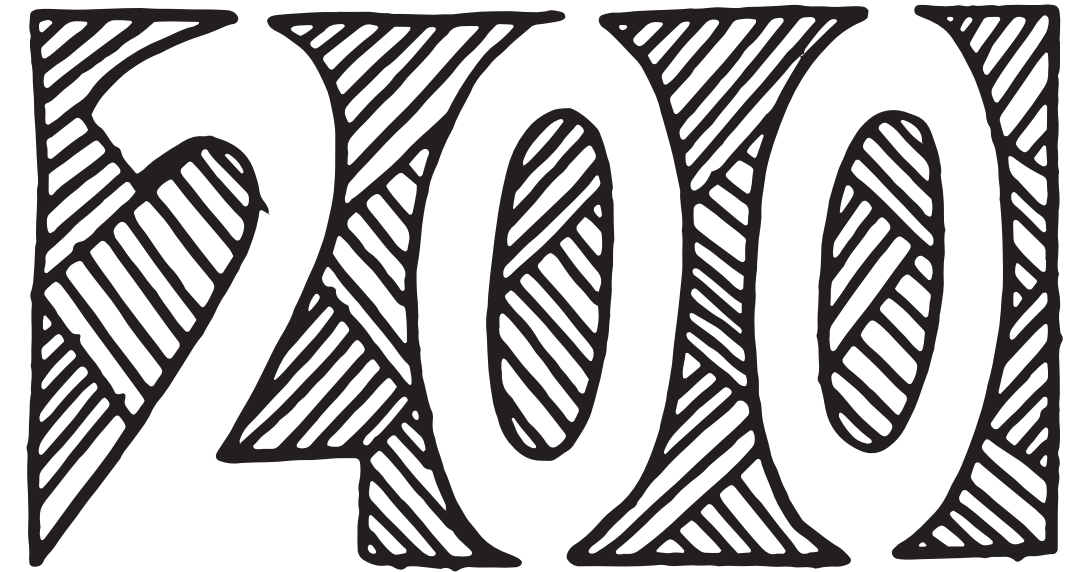


BORN FREE TRUST FUND



Bling

Father



BORN FREE TRUST FUND

Getting the Rich TO BEHAVE themselves

GETTING THE RICH TO BEHAVE THEMSELVES

Hagen Engler

In musing on the antics of the youth of today, it's useful to remember that youth as a philosophical life stage has not existed for terribly long. The idea of an intermediate phase between child- and adulthood is a relatively recent development. Childhood, even, is said to be a fairly recent introduction to the canon of human development. It is sometimes said that the Victorians "invented childhood" in that they legislated the maximum number of hours a child could be employed at work, thus freeing up time for kids to play and generally muck around being children. Previously, children were put to work as soon as they were physically able. In various cultures this would have meant minding cattle, grinding corn, repairing machinery or sweeping chimneys – the latter being an activity in which their size gave them an advantage.

From the time of the industrial era, the lot of children has improved and societies' attitude to education has evolved. Today in South Africa, a child is likely to be educated at least until Grade 9, by which stage they should be about fourteen.

During the education phase, children are expected to be supported by their parents, or the state. After that, and often well beyond the end of one's educational career, dependence on one's parents continues. For the more talented, ambitious and the more affluent, education usually includes tertiary study, probably financed by study loans, or financially established parents. That will take you to the age of 21, 22. If you fail the odd year or follow a lengthy professional course, you can expect to be 25 before you are expected to go out, find a job, and generally look after yourself.

Even then, for the elite, certain large purchases, like a car, house, laptop or speedboat, will still require the assistance of the aforementioned affluent parents. So the period of financial dependence stretches beyond the twenties. Psychologically, this makes for an adult generation of mental "children" who might not even then have developed a sense of independence or self-determination.

A youth spent in poverty could play out with the person leaving school as early as possible to work the family plot, or to desperately seek work. This may see them employed or utterly broken and rejected, returning to the township home to live off the social grants of others. But for the affluent, financial and psychological adolescence stretches into middle age. And so, during this period, boundaries blur between what responsibilities fall to the sovereign individual, and what will be handled by the family.

So, for instance, you'll find a 30-year-old man who ignores parental advice not to drink and drive, but when arrested for it, will phone his mom and expect her to organise him a lawyer. And the man's 30! In most cases, having children of one's own will hasten the path towards maturity. But this won't necessarily make you independent. If there's any one category of people that loves kids, it's grandparents, and the affluent grandparent will often start lavishing financial support on their children as a way of ensuring the best opportunities for their grandkids. For instance, helping their daughter to buy a house in a particular area, so

their grandkids can go to a particular school. This kind of assistance will continue until the grandkids reach adolescence and beyond.

So for the financially favoured who don't feel inclined to go out and make their own fortunes, independence never quite arrives. They are drip-fed financial assistance for life, first by their folks and then from a trust fund. Little surprise, then, that rich kids who are still of school-going age can possess an immaturity and a sense of entitlement of jaw-dropping scale. Kids are spoilt because their parents are spoilt by their grandparents who might even themselves have been spoilt by their great-grandparents. It takes some kind of dynastic wealth to afford private schooling in any case.

Tales of adolescent indulgence don't surprise me. Coke orgies occur at the interzone where affluence, immaturity and opportunity intersect. And in an aspirational country like ours, this behaviour will necessarily lead to imitation by the social strata that style their behaviour according to that of the more privileged classes.

But we're not here to judge. People with money and time on their hands have the right to do what they want with it. The people affected by it are primarily themselves. Society suffers in the second instance if we don't benefit from the education of these privileged individuals, perhaps if they don't qualify to become doctors, lawyers or employers.

That's probably the main responsibility of the affluent class: to invest their skills and abilities in society. They have the means to ensure their descendants have the same skills and opportunities to benefit society. If that happens against a background of extended dependence, and self-indulgence, those are the peculiarities of the affluent. But you don't want things getting out of hand, where those with the assets start spending it all on themselves, their families and their personal peccadilloes. And that's why we have laws.



SKHOTHANE Behavior



SKHOTHANE BEHAVIOUR

Buyani Duma

The nyaope overdose that was my hair was safely covered by the doek I had tied around my head as I paced like a black nurse through the deserted streets, thighs chicken-skinned by the early morning breeze. Only the roosters were around to see me in my embarrassing state and they boyishly cock-a-doodled as I passed, rendering an excitement I can only liken to how Mshoza would feel in Orania.

My pace increased as I slid my hips in and out of the narrow passageways between shacks in my red, satin nightdress, the one Ebenezer with the tenders bought for me on Valentimer's day. I reached my destination, which was the shiny glass sliding door of Mercy's shack. I gave it a gentle knock, trying my best to avoid my own dreadful reflection in front of me. Eventually, after a few minutes of knocking like a soap opera damsel, I started knocking like a policewoman whose pants were too tight for her womanly posterior.

"Who's knocking on my door so early in the morning?" asked Mercy as she opened the door with great reluctance. Her white calamine lotion-covered face, which resembled the ghost of the Indian lady who sacrificed her hair for my last weave, sent streams of warm urine galloping down my panty-less thighs. I invited myself into her ornately decorated shack complete with the trademark pink ceramic dogs which sat prettily on her "Bernadette" room divider from Price and Pride. I sat myself down on her Angelique lounge suite with its couches still in plastic covers three years after their purchase.

As soon as Mercy finished rubbing her eyes to consciousness I started telling her about my blackgirl crisis.

"Mzala, I need your help," I told her in a voice laden with embarrassment. "I need to borrow the weave you had on last month, the one with red and yellow highlights," I continued.

Her reaction was somewhat perplexing. First, she gave me a look of pure

shock with both her hands covering her mouth and her eyes popping like Winnie Khumalo's breasts at a Kalawa bash. Then she laughed until cakes of calamine cracked from her face and drizzled into polka dots onto her cleavage. This schizophrenic reaction lasted for 15 minutes with Mercy alternating between the two reactions until she calmed down and settled with her "relate" concerned face.

"Chomi, what's going on?" she asked.

It was a good question. Why was the Princess Diana of the taxi rank in need of a recycled weave? Had she run out of big spenders with multiple tenders to entertain? Had Blackingham Palace been broken into?

No, it was none of the above.

I was simply dating a Skhothane named Zwelethu, known to everyone in Skhothane circles as Zwelectrifier. He and I had been seeing each other for only three weeks and already I had not only exhausted my funds but I was slightly in debt. He would borrow money to buy the latest edition of Carvela shoes, which he'd also use to cover my face when we made love. Sometimes he'd make me stick the payslips of his expensive Nike track pants on my chest during foreplay. That seemed to arouse him. On many occasions I'd catch him violently masturbating while staring at his expensive Puma sneakers.

But that was beside the point. The point was that I was in a parasitic relationship with an unemployed boy with outlandish spending habits. I was in love with a boy who bought clothes and burned them quicker than you could say "cum." Zwelectrifier made me sell everything to pay his debts with multiple loan sharks. My fridge was empty and I didn't even have a can of Lucky Star in my cupboard because of him. When I'd ask him why he insisted on this lifestyle when he knew he was not rich, he'd get extremely offended and recite the price of every item he was wearing, from his R800 T-shirt to his R400 underwear. He'd end his recital with a self-assured, "Just look at me!"

I was wasting my time and I knew that very well. I planned to leave him but every time he came home in his blue floral pants, the ones so tight you could see every fold of his foreskin from a mile away, and whispered sweet words like, "My Gucci Versace, my Armani beauty," I'd melt and forget that by the time he left he would have my weave in a plastic bag ready to go and sell. That was how I arrived here: a victim of Skhothane behaviour, forced to wear the hair someone else had last month.

I've often wondered what would happen if Zwelectrifier stole and borrowed so passionately for an education. What if he invested that

R1,800 he spent every month in a university degree? Perhaps then he wouldn't have to steal his girlfriend's hair to feed his bizarre consumer habits. In fact, if every poor black woman substituted their notoriously expensive Tupperware or AMC with more constructive things like education of a better quality for their kids, I'm certain that the present condition of sluggish progression would not be as severe.

I've noticed through personal experiences that we black people, particularly the financially disadvantaged majority of black people, are deeply ashamed of our own poverty, as if it were our fault that we were born into it. We are so obsessed with the shame that is attached to it that we adopt excessive lifestyles instead of admitting to being poor and finding effective ways to change that. We adorn our teeth, ears and necks with expensive jewellery to prove that we are not poor. We buy expensive clothes and hair and we laugh at those among us who don't have the time to fabricate wealth.

Isn't that the crux of black issues? Our financial reality is divorced from our spending reality and the fact that I was sitting in a shack with a glass sliding door was testament to that. The thousands of shacks with DSTV dishes precariously mounted on corrugated steel roofs also prove the unorthodox nature of black spending habits. You could say consumerism has us by our designer panty but we won't change because in this world where everything depends on instant gratification it is easier to pretend to have than admit that you don't. It's a self-sustaining pattern of unsustainable behaviour and as long as it is perpetuated we shall remain in this state of slow progression.

Sure, the Skhothanes, through their vulgar display of outlandish consumer behaviour, expose the stupidity of it all. But we all buy things because we like things and we'll chuck away those things for the newer things, forgetting why we even bought the older things. We are all Skhothanes in that regard and we have no right to criticise a heightened display of our own behaviour.

Mercy loaded a pirated Tyler Perry movie on her plasma TV, stood behind me and sewed her dishevelled weave into my hair because, like everyone else, I too would go as far as donating my lips to Helen Zille to prove that I had money for fake hair rather than admit I didn't.

Feiyue.

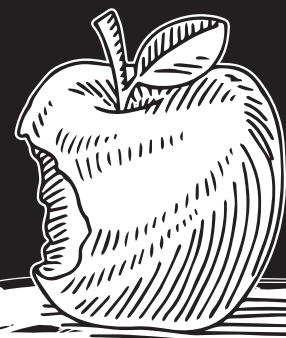
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Flying
onward

China



A MORAL Story



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A MORAL STORY

Liam Kruger

So, I got bitten by a hobo a couple of days ago.

I should probably back up: my limited experience interacting with other people has taught me that it's best to start a story with some preamble before getting into the meat of it, so let's pretend that first line, or "hook," hasn't happened yet.

I was at a bar, as you could probably guess. I'm not entirely sure if I'm allowed to name establishments in this forum, so you cool kids in Cape Town can fill in the blanks to puzzle out the name: "Like a cat on a hot ___."

To those genius savants out there who figured that one out, you should at this moment be judging me: the above bar is not the sort of bar a distinguished gentleman like myself should be frequenting. And you would be right to judge me: except it was near the end of the month, so I was broke, and I was surrounded by a gaggle of nubile young law students, each one shouting, "I just wanna dance!" which put me in an awkward position.

I could have gone home, made myself an omelette and taken a cold shower to sober up and stop thinking about gyrating and repressed law students – or, I thought to myself, I could swallow my pride, go to the dirty, awful bar, and see if I could get one of the law students to do something objectionable. That didn't work out, by the way: it turns out that this particular establishment isn't the sort of bar you go to for witty conversation. I've since learned that barroom etiquette is summed up in the word "lunge."

I have learned from this experience, but at the time I was but a naive babe, drunk and confused at the way pretty law students would laugh at my hilarious comments and then allow themselves to be fondled by strange bearded men with Ed Hardy hats and popped collars. Cursing fate, the law department and the vast majority of the human condition, I threw some more alcohol at my mouth and left in a huff. Wait, sorry, I didn't leave in a huff – I walked home. Singing.

If going to the abovementioned bar was Mistake Numero Uno of the evening, I suspect walking home, singing to myself (Rufus Wainwright's "Hallelujah," which isn't a comment on anything in particular save my uncanny inability to recall the lyrics to any other song while pale and twitchy) was Mistake Numero Dos.

Fortunately, Mistake Numero Tres was right there to join the party, when a seemingly friendly hobo extended his hand in greeting and I decided it would be a good idea to try and shake it.

The next thing I knew, I was being held up against a wall, being very politely asked for my wallet and my phone. Sadly, I couldn't acquiesce to his request, because I had left my phone at home, knowing that I was probably going to end up at a certain unsavoury bar, and my wallet was empty because I'd spent all of my money at that same bar! Jokes on you, Mr Bergie!

So after an evening of striking out with nubile law students, and then being accosted by a lone hobo at two in the morning, my frustration reached peak levels, and I lashed out in Hulk-like fashion. Which is to say, I wildly pushed at Mr Bergie, who I suspect may have been a little tweaked at the time, and ran home.

On arriving at my domicile, I noticed an odd pain on my shoulder, but being at once pumped to the eyeballs with adrenaline and doused to the liver with alcohol, thought nothing of it, and promptly fell asleep. I woke, however, to find the same deeply unpleasant pain throbbing at about shoulder level. Finally motivated to action, I lifted my fragile 62-year-old body off the couch and approached the mirror.

What I saw scared me more than usual. Somehow, by some bizarre freak of dentistry, Mr Bergie had managed to latch his gap-toothed jaw onto my back during our scuffle, leaving a complete impression of his dental record on my shoulder.

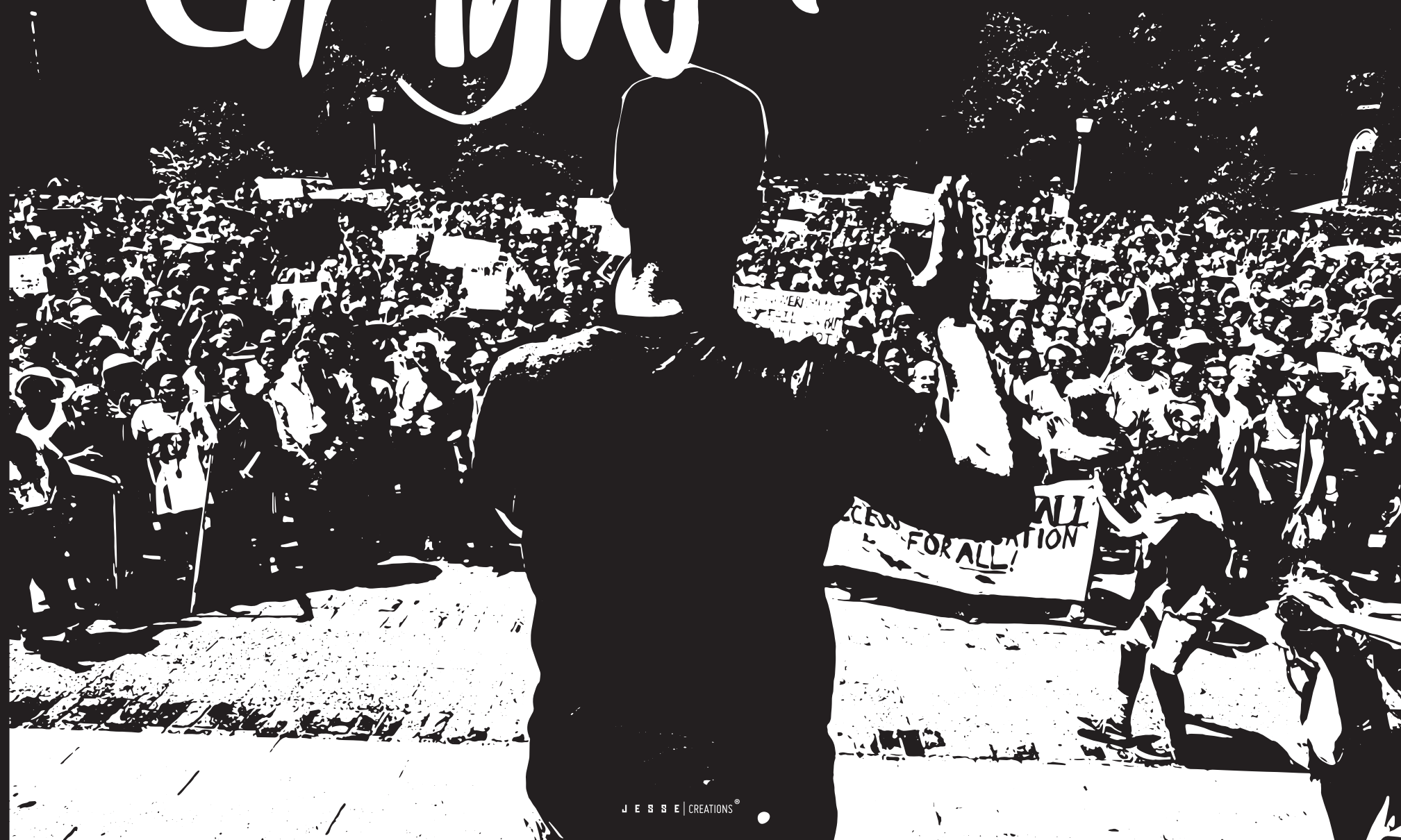
This is how most zombie movies start: a friend casually mentions,

"Oh, funny story, I got bitten by a hobo this morning!" and then the next thing you know, they're freaking out and trying to eat your brains. I always thought I'd be one of the survivors in the zombie movies: it turns out I'm that guy who gets bitten, but tries to hide it, and ends up eating most of the survivors, only to get his head blown off by the hero. It's a sobering thought.

The moral of the story is this: don't go to seedy bars with law students, otherwise you'll get your head blown off during the zombie apocalypse.



BETHE conglomerate



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BE THE CONGLOMERATE

Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh

Much has been said recently about so-called "young people" entering the political fray in more than a tokenistic way. The new fashion is to urge "young South Africans" to become "active citizens," which often means little more than being prepared to join a protest. Yes, this is all very important and, of course, "activity" beats "inactivity," but affecting the political spectrum will take more than simply feeling "active." People who have thought further than this have proposed a youth-led political party as a more effective way of changing the South African political status quo. Certainly, this would have the effect of uniting an otherwise disparate and ineffectual youth interest group in South Africa, but it would still only be one dimension of the machine required to fundamentally transform our society.

More effective than this would be an economic formation of young people in addition to these other socio-political efforts to address the crisis confronting young South Africans: we need to be the conglomerate, not the brand. This means finding ways of creating a capital base significant enough to matter at the level of political funding, not just being seen giving commentary on ENCA. There is a great deal of "dead capital" sitting in the wallets of young South Africans that can be used to create the fundamental change we all want to see in our society; our job is to make it work for us.

What I think young South Africans have failed to realise is that we are not just an important social demographic group but an important

economic interest group, too. Big retailers know this; why don't we? Who buys all the consumer goods? Who spends all the money in clubs? Who goes to the shopping malls? Who are the young professionals

driving investment banks, consulting firms and corporate offices? Who is driving the mobile revolution? Who makes the music? Who buys it? Think for a moment. If we define "youth" widely, there are about 15 million of us. Say, conservatively, that 20% of us are employed full-time and we earn R5,000 per month. That equates to a total buying power of R15bn per month, or R180bn per year.

That is before we consider our cultural influence or the money that is transferred to young people from their parents. That is the kind of economic clout that can get you heard beyond the street you are protesting on. What "young people" must do now if they are to affect the political trajectory of South Africa is navigate ways to use our economic power to leverage political change – not the other way around. Then, we can choose our own politicians and make them sing to our conglomerate's tune.



“Is dit julle wat die wind, is dit julle wat
die wind, is dit julle wat die wind laat
waai?”



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SOMETHING TO SWEAR BY

Sipho Hlongwane

The lead singer of a very famous German heavy metal band called Rammstein once said, "French may be the language of love, but German is the language of anger." I know what he means. Some languages slide easier off the tongue when spoken under extreme strain.

Let me start off by setting the record straight. My exposure to Afrikaans was very short, yet extremely odd. The government, in all its wisdom, decided that teaching Afrikaans to black children was counter-productive or against the spirit of the National Democratic Revolution or something. They gave some oily reason, and just like that, I stopped learning die taal in Grade 7. But I remember very well the few years of exposure that I had.

There was Meneer Van Rooyen in Grade 4. Massive, slow and sunburnt, he would have made a formidable prop or hooker if he weren't such a softy at heart. He had a particularly soft spot for Israel, and would give us free periods if someone piped up, "Meneer Van Rooyen, ek het lief vir Israel!" He cried like a baby whenever the Palestinians killed someone in Israel. He also had an awful habit of stalking through the class with a large ruler in his hands, yelling, "Die punt!" Yes, I learned all about the uses of the full stop in my Afrikaans lessons. Another favourite of his was "Hoofletters!" He left the school after an ugly incident involving a supporter of Yasser Arafat.

In Grade 5 and 6 it was Mevrou Ogterop. She was my own ninth circle of hell. I got more detention hours from her than from all my other teachers combined. I think it's because I refused to take her seriously. She was short, old and very shaky. She never spoke normally. She was of the you-must-shout-for-the-children-to-understand-you disposition, which really didn't endear her to her pupils at all. She taught us silly Boer marching songs about Oom Paulus Kruger en die rooinekke. In a moment of sadism, someone appointed her to teach us art.

Mevrou Ogterop knew as much about art as I do about the bedroom habits of the Archbishop of Canterbury. I spent the last hour of every Thursday painting big, fluffy clouds on paper plates and absolutely hated it. My last Afrikaans teacher was a bucket of fun. She was pushing 50, still unmarried and had an amazing gold tooth that sparkled whenever she smiled. She would waft into the class every morning, smelling of chamomile tea and scented candles, singing, "Is dit julle wat die wind,

is dit julle wat die wind, is dit julle wat die wind laat waai?" To which we had to reply, "Ag, nee!" I have no idea what that song was in aid of. Someone recently pointed out to me that her song might have been a snide reference to breaking wind. Being the mad teens that we were, we quickly substituted that "Ag, nee!" for a suitable expletive. Thank goodness no one ever told our teacher.

My last Afrikaans teacher made me love talking in Afrikaans. Instead of doing stupid exercises in our books, she made us plant a vegetable garden so we could learn the names of all the veggies, tools and farming practices. We would also sit in a big circle on a lawn somewhere, and she would tell us the most amazing stories ... in Afrikaans. Then the government put an end to all that.

Due to the fact that as friends we exclusively spoke either English or Zulu, die taal slowly faded from my memory. I can barely speak it now, let alone read or write it. But there are some things which are best done in Afrikaans. There is nothing like a well-placed Afrikaans swearword to spice up your sentences. It lends you the air of quirkiness and eccentricity.

Most importantly, it makes you sound so South African, and I absolutely love that about Afrikaans.



Oblivion ON the SIDEWALK

OBLIVION ON THE SIDEWALK

Siyabonga Dennis

Walking back on Monday at midday, there was one thought flashing in my mind. I had just been fired. If it's even possible to be fired as an unpaid intern – I had been. Johannesburg is painful during summer, the sun harsh, the air dry and the world cold. Failure is what being terminated feels like, the failure of being incompetent as a volunteer, the failure of

being told, "Thanks for coming."

I'd worked at the Times and then the Sowetan for a month and three days. Work is an overstatement: I did a story once a week, went to government events twice a week and fucked about on the interwebs for the rest of the week. This was my working life that I had been so keen to dream about.

Boredom made me feel self-important. If only they would give me a chance: I would dazzle and amaze the minds of my editors, sub-editors and Enoch, the guy who pushed the sweet trolley. But they didn't and my boredom spiralled into despair, then anger, and finally, "I just don't give a fuck."

I was sweating. The early morning rain lied to me. There was to be no solace from the black-burning heat from the yellow eyeball in the sky. The dust rose and settled on my shoes with every kick of my walk. I kept on tugging on the sleeve of my shirt to determine the extent of my sweat patch. I wanted somebody to come up to me, to inquire, to take an interest in my pathetic despair.

Then suddenly he appeared. Not God or Muhammad or even fucking Yoda, but a tall Indian man beset with acne and a vacant stare. I saw him cross the road from the Spaza shop holding two brown packets and walk over, faintly smiling to my mobile patch of limbo. I saw him but it didn't register until he grabbed my arm.

"What the fuck, bra?" I hissed, not wanting to become another rape statistic for CNN or BBC to show the scared white western world. "Hello." This neat word fell out his mouth and immediately began ringing in my head. "I see your face, very nice, but the lines do not do it justice." What? Was he coming onto me? "Huh? Who are you?"

As soon as I had stammered this, he launched into a long and furious telling of his trip from India to South Africa. He told me about his ashram, showed me a magnificently blurry picture of the orphanage he came from.

"Deese are all my brothers," he said, giving me his card which seemed to depict some lusty bestial god.

"Uhh, okay man, but I'm an atheist."

"Athe-ist? Ohhh, infidel? Eh? I don't care, you believe yourself and money."

"No, I don't believe in money."

"You look Ethiopian."

"What?"

"So, you have small donation then?"

So this man from the orphanage of his strange sex god was looking for a handout. I had money enough to keep me going until my girlfriend decided to bring me some soup and sandwiches, but there's was no way I was feeling generous enough to offer him even a meagre percentage of my soul. But hey, the man had come all the way from India. He was reduced to stalking the main road between Parkhurst and Rosebank in order to meet the requirements of his lusty elephant god and more importantly his stomach.

I took my wallet out. I intended to give my tall, brown religious sales assistant a R5 coin but his deep staring eyes caught the red tinge of a lion-headed R50 note and decided my hands needed a bit more oiling up so he went forth into a spewing of his poverty religion. But in the midst of his rapid ejaculating, he said something that grabbed my brain.

"Today not good and perhaps tomorrow and maybe you know the days after but happiness is a weed. It grow where it's not supposed to so be patient, my friend."

He said this as a side note, just a mere stop in his attempt to glean money from me but it resonated inside me. So I gave him a R20 note. Instead of the lion you get the elephant but here's something to keep you going until your god harasses you again.

We left on good terms, my fast-talking religious salesman and me. I had been hustled out of twenty rand, money that could've bought me a box of cigarettes but out of the excrement had come a pearl. Something to keep me going, something to banish the void that had now eaten my self-esteem.

I walked back to my despairingly overpriced cottage in the World Class African City. I lay down on my bed and just for a moment I smiled. I had received a small measure of truth from a man who just saw me as a target but in his routine, he had mistakenly given something to me. This truth was a seed in me. It had taken root where 18 years of Christian piss hadn't.

So, thank you, my two-bit peddler of religious malarkey. But you still weren't fucking Yoda.





Photography [Mack Michael Magagane]

SUICIDE

Lebohang "Nova" Masango

I understand the weight you carry. I know the hypersomnia. I know how you are a tornado of emotions and heavy-hearted, how suffocating is your ability to feel so much. I know how nonchalance tugs at your eyelids, quiet like a whisper, and wills you to slumber your life away. I know how sleep seems the only solace and how suicide seems the only silence. At times, I know sleep fights you, the staying awake past reason and the exhaustion that settles into your bones. There is the lethargy that shadows all your motions and manifests itself as a lack of want for food, school and all you enjoy. I know that some mornings, the waking up is a heavy and hard world to walk into, how this sadness and anxiety covers you, midnight-thick and consuming.

Yet, Dr Seuss said it best: "There is no one alive that is you-er than you." You are here for a purpose. You are here to be and become. You are here to add to this Earth. Rather than try to harm yourself or turn to suicide, remember that there are people who love you and need your presence. There is no real comfort in cutting, pills, drugs or alcohol because they do not have the answers that you seek or the balm to soothe your hurt. Please dare to believe in the goodness of the world. Seek out a friendly face with a warm heart because, truly, there are plenty and all you have to do is look up. Believe in possibility and positivity. Take charge of your life by surrounding yourself with positive and inspirational people, exercising, changing your routine, and being with people who affirm your worth in their lives so that you are able to use them to reflect the truth: that you are special and capable of being amazing. There will always be darkness but always know how precious you are. How you are a smile and joy made in the name of sunlight.

Always understand that you are beautiful and necessary.

Understand that you are unique and that you have been blessed with a brain that works differently. No one can ever make a diagnosis that will end your life as you know it – it is all about rising to the challenge and overcoming circumstance. We are a world of strugglers: some struggle with money, some with learning a new sport and some with mood disorders. Although the trouble you have is chemical and hormonal, it is only slight because you are in control. Every day, people wake up, face the day and continue living. You can too, simply by living day to day in the mission to better yourself. No matter what comes your way, always

know that it has been overcome and that you can overcome it again. Make the choice to get out of bed and start the day. Make the choice to succeed. Make the choice to live. Indeed, it is your life. Whether it be speaking to someone about your feelings or seeking a doctor for help, each step you take in becoming a better you is a victory within itself. You were born to win, each day, and be great. The world is still awaiting the best of you.

Dear [unclear]
I hope you are well. I was just
thinking about you and how much
I miss you. I will be back
in [unclear] soon. I will be
in [unclear] for a few days.
I hope you are well. I will be
back in [unclear] soon. I will be
in [unclear] for a few days.

the JOYS OF COCAINE

THE JOYS OF COCAINE

Rafael Powell



Well, my Dear Readers, it seems that summer has finally graced us with her presence. Cape Townians are returning to the bars and clubs, thus removing themselves from their self-imposed exile. With this re-emergence of the party culture comes a re-emergence of the festival. Those of you who live around the Cape Town area will be aware of this because you will have been asked, "Are you going to Earth Dance/Rocking The Daisies?" more times than Charlie Sheen has been arrested. It also brings with it more nefarious aspects of human nature, one of these being the party drug. "Hello, you lovely concoction of chemicals. Will you make me happy today?" The answer is always a resounding, "Yes, my dear friend, of course I will." Down the hatch it goes followed

by a cut-scene montage of you drinking, hitting on people you shouldn't hit on and, most likely, ingesting some more of your social aid. The morning, or more likely the afternoon, then greets you with a rather sullen, "What the fuck do you want?" before leaving you behind to nurse your head, wallet and ego. Of the party drugs around none stands quite as tall and as proud as cocaine. There seems to be no drug that has been quite as publicly accepted and idolised. It seems that people are more likely to lecture you longer and with more enthusiasm about the dangers of cigarettes than they are to reprimand you about the use of this little white powder.

It was used by Sigmund Freud to keep his mind sharp. Musicians have been widely known to find its mysterious qualities a necessity for inspiration and fun. Sherlock Holmes, who is, admittedly, fictional, was known to keep a pouch of the stuff on his person at all times in order to keep his wits. He was most likely tripping balls when pointing out that The Butler was the culprit in question. And then, of course, there is Scarface. Scarface, who brought "Yayo" into popular vocabulary. Scarface, who had a beautiful office and a beautiful girlfriend. Scarface, who had wanted you to meet his "Lil fren." Scarface, who eventually ends up dead in his own pool. Now, let us delve into the biology of this mystical drug. Cocaine stimulates, among other things, your limbic system, which is situated roughly in the centre of the brain. This is the part of the brain that is responsible for the "Go forth into the world" feeling that most of us have. It's basically your drive to go out and do shit. This is why people who are on coke are often peering over your shoulder while they are talking to you: because they're looking for something else to do. This isn't all bad and it isn't all good. It propels people to do something with themselves which, in the current climate of apathy, is commendable. The downside is that even when you've found what it is you were looking for, your gland is still being activated, which means that you never get that sense of accomplishment. Funnily enough, the chemical composition of cocaine is actually fairly benign. It's not very different to that of Ritalin or Concerta, which are drugs given to students to help them concentrate. The problem comes in when drinking is involved. Alcohol bonds to the chemical and creates an entirely new substance.

Unfortunately, cocaine is a party drug and thus it's often accompanied by a sneaky beer or two, which is why it becomes so hectic. The new chemical in your body does more than enhance your drive and provide some euphoria: it also makes your movements sluggish and

uncoordinated which, coupled with your need to do stuff, creates frustration. Frustration very easily turns into aggression or depression. And now, if my attempts at wit, humour and biology have not made the point, I shall rely on cold and unyielding logic.

Someone says, "Why not just try it?" There are two outcomes to doing anything in the world: you like it, or you don't. So, if you imbibe a narcotic, you either like it, or you do not. If you do not like it, you have done nothing more than waste an evening and some cash, and maybe embarrassed yourself a little bit.

Now, if you like it, the consequences are far subtler. You have to then gauge it against real-life expectations. This means realising that, mostly, you are required to wake up in the morning and do some work (because, alas, life is not the perennial party we wish it to be). From this gauge, it will be necessary to assert a modicum of will power in order not to take it in your daily life.

Or, you end up taking it regularly and all goes well for a while. Maybe you work it out of your system and stop. Maybe you don't. If you don't, over a few years, an addiction forms and it goes from being a drug habit to a drug problem. This argument may seem weak because people are all, like, "But that's years from now and I'll definitely stop by then and I have time." But bear in mind that the majority of us do plan to live for a fairly long time, so chances are that you are going to have to "cross that bridge" because you'll be there. My other point is that the longer you use, the more difficult it becomes to stop. Now, before I come off sounding like your mother after she caught you smoking for the first time, let me conclude. I'm not saying you shouldn't try it out for yourself or that drugs are necessarily bad. I think experimentation is the key to a happy life. Otherwise, how are you going to know what floats your boat? I merely think that drugs are powerful and, as such, should be treated with respect. Respect entails knowing what it is you are taking as well as making sure you're taking it right. It's also important to remember that your mind state is altered while you are on drugs, which in itself is not a bad thing, but we must always be aware that other people probably don't have any idea of your frame of reference. You really don't want to be "that guy."



the PASSION the Pride

THE PASSION, THE PRIDE, THE PUSSY, THE POINT

Hagen Engler

There's no more frank a form of advice than what you get from a total stranger. Lawrence and Themba only met an hour ago, but already Themba has some pertinent advice for his new acquaintance.

"Don't fuck it up, bra! Do not fuck it up! If you want pussy, there's all the pussy you need here. Don't go break up with her just because you miss her. Fly over there once a year."

The subject is long-distance relationships. Lawrence's girlfriend is studying at Oxford. Oxford! Doing a PPE degree in politics, philosophy and economics.

Lawrie's only now grasping the sheer pain and loss of not having his lady around. At the same time he's grappling with the temptation of being on the Joburg social scene with no obvious lady on his arm and more loose, freaky women eyeing him than he'd ever have thought possible.

He's suffering from guilt. He feels guilty that he feels attracted to these other women. And he dreads the possibility that he may break down and shag some of them while he's in that long-distance relationship with his lady, Khensani.

Themba is all about the big picture. This lady is the best that Lawrence is ever going to have. She is on a path to greatness. So what if she's going to be in the UK studying for a few years? You just head on over there and hang out for a bit every year. If you get horny here at home in SA, you just do what you need to do. You go to The Attic in Parkhurst, or you go drop a couple of grand on Patron at Latinova, you meet some girls, offer one of them a lift home.

Don't get too attached to nobody. Keep phoning her, man. Maybe propose to her. You want to be keeping that lady interested. Go over there and propose to her. Look at you, man! You're miserable. You need to keep this thing alive. Don't fuck it up, dog. It can be done. You can keep a long-distance relationship going for as long as you want, man.

Lawrence is not so sure. The lady's only been away for three weeks and it's tearing him apart. He can't live like this. He can't pine for this woman like this for another four years. He can't do it. It's going to kill him.

He needs his woman with him, not on the other side of the world. And that Khensani is focused on her career, on her goals, is throwing his own tenuous career planning into stark contrast. When she was working at the nightclub, hostessing, freaking out as her departure date approached — when she was doing that, his job subbing on the newspaper looked positively careerist.

Now it's looking a lot more like the flat, dead-end job it really is, while K has her whole future mapped out. When she comes back

and slots into a position as a publishing company executive, all black and fabulous, he's going to be looking pretty ordinary.

Does he even deserve her? Was this thing ever really destined to go the distance? Did they perhaps get together precisely because there was this built-in deadline, this pending departure? Maybe that's the only thing that really brought them together, the knowledge that, like it or not, they were going to have to part after six months or so, when K headed off on her London adventure.

Then they'd stumbled in the final act, when they were supposed to have the tearful break-up. They just couldn't do it and they'd sworn to somehow make it work. They'd stay in touch, do a lot of Skype — run the relationship like a video conference. Except that's not really how Lawrence was raised.

If there's one thing he is about, it is physical, relentless loving. He is a man of intense passion, a slave to his urges. And now his girl is gone.

"I'm having fuckin' six wanks a day," he shouts at Themba, just as there comes a silent lull between songs. And still his urges aren't keeping quiet. On the other side of the braai a lady with a long set of light-brown braids is rocking a pair of tight cotton shorts over a set of those sheer black leggings with the little rhinestone detail by the zipper at the ankle.

It is Lerato, from the same club where Khensani used to work. But fuck that. He just can't see himself holding out for four years. And Mike has this bottle of Lagavulin that he is forcing on anybody who looks vaguely interested. Single malt, boet.

Lawrence's phone rings. It is that same +44 number. Khensani from London. He excuses himself. "Babe?"

Back at the braai, Themba prods the marinated lamb and shakes his head. "He just mustn't fuck it up."

And so, within Lawrence Davis, the battle rages. This faithfulness thing ... Was it going to work? And what was the point anyway?

The point, Themba Modise, muses, as he fields his first phone call of the evening from his wife — the point. Ah, the point is to finish with all the bullshit and mind games of the single scene, to find yourself the best woman you possibly can, so you can mellow out and concentrate on other stuff.

"Ja. We are about to start eating," he tells his wife. "I should be home in about an hour."



