

our voices



## dearreaders

It is finally here! Our Voice; Our Voices! Sweet ululation and jubilation; Our Voice is here.

You hold now in your hand and on your screen the manifestation of a dream: A dream to see African women take up space in literature and art. A dream to revive what once was forgotten. A dream to breathe life into the dust.

You hold now in your hand a song as sweet as honey, with a violent melody that boats a beauty of pain. What you run your fingers through now is the cry of our mothers' bodies transformed from battlefield to art; the unrequited longing of our sisters; the last breath of our dying grandmothers.

What you hold now between your fingertips is the soul of voice,

Because it is finally here! Our Voice; Our Voices!

Sweet ululation and jubilation; Our Voice is here.

For as long as I can remember, I have felt a unique connection to books and poetry. When I was no more than 8 going on 10 years, I developed an intense passion for reading. I would look forward to the hours spent tucked within the spine of a good adventure or romance novel and discover my sense of wonder in the long silences and withheld breaths of a cliffhanger or mystery. I still remember one of the first books that pulled me in: It was an ordinary day in the library and I had picked up a copy of Roald Dahl's "The witches". Fast forward a few hours and I had already consumed the story from cover to cover.

This momentary dance with the grand high witch and children turned into all manner of mouse, oil painting and stones opened up a new world of authors including. . . Jaqueline Wilson, Phillip Pullman and the occasional Jackie Collins (when I needed the blood to rush through my veins a little faster).

I could furnish this list with all manner of gifted authors from the riveting Dan brown to the romantic entanglements of Danielle Steele: by the time I was in my teens, I had etsablished books as my way of escaping as well as understanding reality. However, I could not help but ponder on what was missing when the books I loved so much did not depict or celebrate my reality in any way. I could not help but wonder if there was a place for people like me in the pages of fiction and non-fiction alike

It was only when, several years later, I picked up a copy of Tsitsi Dangarembga's nervous conditions that I began to see the possibility of people like me immortalized and celebrated in literature. I found myself relating to Nyasha's desperation and unrelenting fight for liberation whilst growing up in a patriarchal household set against the backdrop of systematic racism and sexism. In Nyasha's small acts of rebellion and insistent search for an identity lost, I found the deliberate effort of a writer to not only tell a story but to use her art as a tool to question and deconstruct the colonial patriarchy embedded in the lives of young women growing up in 1960's Rhodesia. It is safe to say that I was hooked, and have not looked back since.

From this literary epiphany, and many university lessons on African women's history and Ferninist history, came my passion for creating platforms that celebrate African women's stories and voices. Fast forward a few years, and I have been given the opportunity to edit Our Voices!

Sweet Ululation and Jubilation, Our Voice is here! In this booklet, I hope you will find women's stories, told through a woman's lens. You will find stories of great sorrow and loss but you will also find within these pages the triumphant proclamations of women reclaiming the African woman's narrative and beautiful tales of bodies transformed from battlefield to art. Against the backdrop of the monumental Beijing declaration and Platform for action that called for strong commitments on the part of the government and other institutions to fully recognize women's inalienable human rights and gender equality, and imagines a world where each woman and girl can exercise her freedoms, choices and realize her rights, Our Voices aims to use art and storytelling to review the progress of our nations against the lived experiences and stories of women in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

And to the women of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe: I hope this booklet resonates with you and within it you find your voice:

Our Volces, Mau Athu, Mazwi Edu Amashiwi Yesu.

t.msowaya

"The curation and publication of this booklet has been made possible with support from our partners at urgent action fund Africa. Osisa. Ford foundation and Katswe sistahood. All works of art featured remain the copyright of the contributing artists"









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mou ather

"Amayi anati.

Ine ndapita

Anthuwa ndi

nkhondo

Mwana wanga,

usamale . . .



#### Overview of the 'Letters' Podcast

Africa's history is full of women who have been instrumental to its history and progression, the stories of these women are often overlooked or ignored completely. We decided, as Wona Collective, to create the Letters podcast as an attempt to engage African women in telling their own stories and making sure that each of these women and their stories are immortalised. The podcast also focuses on a diverse range of stories, not just the well-known women but the women one may not have heard of otherwise (artists, doctors, nurses, chiefs, lawyers, judges, etc.)

The first season of Letters focuses on the stories of Malawian women and our goal is to expand the podcast to the point of producing episodes with various African women outside of just Malawi. In each episode of Letters, the featured woman writes an open letter to either other women, an abstract concept or to themselves. The aim of the letter itself is to give us a look into the mind of the woman and get a multi-dimensional view of who they are and what is important to them.

One of the letters featured on the podcast is "A Letter to Rose Chibambo from Timwa Lipenga", the late Rose Chibambo was the first female cabinet minister in Malawi and Timwa Lipenga is the author of her biography; this letter was Timwa's final goodbye to Rose as she spoke about the things about Rose's life that stuck with her.

Here we share excerpts from the first episode in the Letters series: Letter to Rose Chibambo. Note that amitted content from the original podcast will be denoted with by an ellipsis in square brackets – [...]

Alinafe Malonje: Welcome, everyone, to our first episode of Letters, I am Nafe

Lerato Honde: And Lerato

**Alinafe:** So since this is the first episode we should probably explain what exactly this is. So Letters is a podcast, as you can see or hear, and every episode is going to feature a different Malawian woman who has done something amazing with her life in her own way. And we keep describing them as change makers, leaders, nurturers in so many ways that you can be impactful as a person and as a woman.

**Alinafe:** And those stories are very easily forgotten or erased. So we thought, why not make a podcast, why not call these women and have them feature? So each of these women have written a letter, either to another woman, to an abstract concept, to themselves, and each episode is going to be a different woman telling a different letter.

Lerato: So today we're having Letters to Rose and that's to Rose Chibambo. So Alinafe and I went to the book launch for Lomuthinda: Rose Chibambo Speaks by Timwa Lipenga. I designed the cover for that book and we really learned a lot about Rose Chibambo and her history, not only being the woman on the **200** Kwacha note, but there's so much to remember her for. She was the first female cabinet minister. She started the women's league in the fight for independence and, we were just really drawn to the story, so welcome to Letters to Rose.

Alinate: So just a bit of an overview about Rose Chibambo. Rose Chibambo was born on the 8th of September 1928, and she was named Lomathinda Ziba. Rose was the founder of the Women's League in the Nyasaland African Congress. She founded the Women's League after learning of the plans to bring Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, which is now Zambia, and Southern Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe, together in a federation.

Alinafe: When Malawi gained independence, she won a seat in parliament in Mzimba North, and she later opposed Kamuzu Banda's rule and had to flee the country, living in exile in Zambia for 30 years. So that's just a bit of a snapshot of her life, and I read Lomathinda by Timwa Lipenga, so we have to give, first of all, a shout out to Timwa for writing this book because a lot of the stuff that I now know about Rose is because of this book and because of her initiative to research her and write her story.

And she wrote the book in a way that it's Rose speaking for herself. And she put in the pauses where she would laugh, which I feel like is relevant, because in both of the letters, Timwa and Lomuthi spoke about her as having a great sense of humour despite any struggles that she had in the past.

[...]

Alinate: So Timwa, that is the first letter are going to listen to. Timwa is the author of the biography as I mentioned. She's also a lecturer in French at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. She has a Ph.D. in French from the University of Aberdeen. And before she was a lecturer, she featured as a writer and a sub editor for The Nation Publications. Two of her stories have been published in African Road: New Writing from Southern Africa, and in The Daily Assortment of Astonishing Things, the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2016.

**Timwa Lipenga:** So I'm really someone who loves books. In doing this I'm actually doing something that I love. So you can say I'm a reader, I'm a bookworm, I'm a sister, I'm a wife, I'm an ount. So, yeah, that's just part of who I am

**Alinafe:** She's also the director of Makewana's Daughters, which is a forum that encourages Malawian women to write short stories and poems.

[...]

Alinafe to Timwa: What drew you to this story? Timwa: A few years back, I think it was in 2011, a friend of mine, Dr. Jessie Kabwila, called us together because someone had told her about... someone had actually encouraged her to get women together and write their stories. The someone I'm talking about is Dr. Lewis [...]. So he wrote to her and said is it possible for you to maybe organise some women to do this kind of thing, research of Malawian women. It doesn't matter what they did, just research on them and write something because there's a gap out there. There isn't much research on Malawian women. So as we researched the women, I decided to go with Rose Chibambo, because her story interested me a lot. What interested me was the fact that I had done history before in Malawi, but I hadn't heard of her. So I was like oh, who is she?

Tried to find out more, and the more I found out the more I became intrigued. Well, as we went along, you know, writing proposals for the project, later on, we drew a blank and we were told that this project is not going to have any funding at all. So maybe best to drop it. But by then, I was invested. Yes, I just couldn't stop. I said, no, there has to be a way even if there's no funding. I really want to meet Rose Chibambo, I really want to talk to her. So I decided to first of all do desk research as I was looking for ways in which to get in touch with her. Fortunately, there's professor [...] Soko, he was at Chanco then Mzuzu University, and he gave me her phone number and I called her.

So that's how I decided to go ahead by then. And I wrote to the others to say, well, this is a project we have stored for now, but I'm going ahead because I want to meet her. I want to just find out.

Lerate: I think it's a matter of being proactive. And if you're really passionate about something, you have to be proactive because like you're saying Timwa could have just been like, ok, that's the end of that project. Let me let you just go back and do whatever else I can do, which will actually pay right away. But I think when you are proactive the resources come to you. And things start to fall into place.

**Alinafe:** Yeah Especially when when it's important. And I feel like this was this was important.

Alinafe: Even though it may not be you physically going out there and taking up physical space, I think telling the story and having this impact on Malawi's history and Malawi's current times, that's a way of speaking out.

Alinafe to Lerato: I had also asked her which parts of Rose's story were her favourite.

**Timwa:** It's the childhood stories, you know, when you see her on the **200** Kwacha note, because you think that, ok, I mean my first reaction would be, wow, look at the woman on the **200** Kwacha note.

But when the woman on the 200 Kwacha note talked about burning a precious piece of cloth that her father had bought for her and burning it because she wanted to be like the others... I could identify, because sometimes in childhood we do really, really naughty things just because everyone else is doing it. When she started talking about, ah, my friends were not wearing the kind of clothes I was wearing, so I decided to burn mine and cut it here so that it looked like this. I said, ah yeah, been there. So I love that story. And the fact that she was able to share it with me, I felt honoured by that.

Lerato: It just has me thinking that, you know, when we see her on the banknote, Lomuthi [Rose Chibambo's grand niece] said something like she looks so regal and it's true, you know, you see these public figures, you hear of John Chilembwe,

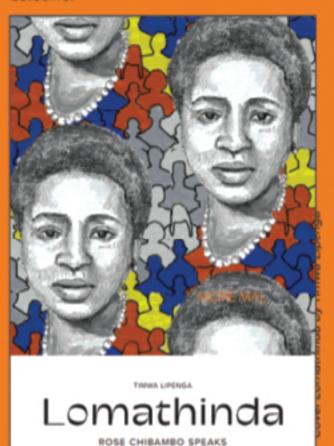
You don't imagine that they were children just like we once were. You don't imagine that they were in their **20**s, just like we are. Yeah. And, you know, they have feelings. They're humans. And I just I really appreciate the fact that when we're learning about public figures, especially with this book, we really get a sense of their emotional train of thought. I appreciate that. I really appreciated that.

[...]

### End of Letters to Rose transcript excerpts

You can listen to the Letters podcast by Wona Collective on all podcast streaming platforms: Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Anchor, Overcast, Google Podcasts etc. Animated versions of all letters heard on this podcast are available on the Wona Collective Instagram and YouTube pages. You can follow Wona Collective on Instagram -

@wona\_collective Twitter - @WonaCollective and on Facebook and Youtube as Wona Collective.

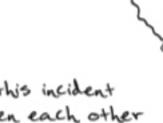






Greetings from Timma, one of your many admirers. Femember me? I am the woman who asked if I could enter into your world for some time, and you welcomed me and gave me space.

What will always stand out for me is how I boarded the bus to Mzuzu, then found my way to your home at Kaning'ina. What I didn't know was that you had driven to the bus stage to meet me.



When we finally met, we laughed about this incident like old friends, and yet we had just seen each other for the first time.



For me, that act of driving out there to meet someone you had never seen before was a mark of your generous spirit.

I salute you for sharing your life story, your joy, your pain I salute you for your love of life, and for always wanting to help others.



What stands out for me is your way of telling a story, the way there was no self-pity, even as you described painful events.

I admire your strength, your get-up-and-go spirit.

Even when other voices were trying to overpower yours, like that day on 8th September, 1964, your birthday, you spoke in Parliament, trying to explain your position during the Cabinet Crisis.





What a birthday ballyaziba! No birthday wishes, just interruptions throughout your speech If I can hold on to my principles no matter what, and if I can make the most of my resources, like you did, then I will definitely feel a sense of accomplishment.





ing of voices, I didn't get to rell you that you had such a lovely singing voice.

Uingue Uingue Jere, oh yawo eh Now that was a moment.

Thank you for making the book possible. You live on, ballya Ziba.

Love, Timwa

Har!

generous sprins



Writing women's life histories and biographies has played a significant role in the growth of women's history as a well-respected and popular field within historical discourse. For almost 2 decades, feminist scholars and historians have played an important role in the celebration of feminist biography as a separate and intriguing glance at the complex subject of "woman". The feminist embrace of oral history and the telling of women's life histories emerged from a recognition that traditional historical sources and discourse have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offers an intriguing means of retrieving women's voices and integrating them into historical scholarship and analysis. Feminist biography as a separate field highlights the fact that women's lives rarely evolve in a straightforward manner, and are often complicated by traditional gender roles and expectations and complex battles with self-awareness and discovery.

Feminist biography offers insight into the social and cultural context within which women are embedded.

Accordingly, conversations with Zondiwe, attempts to offer a telling glimpse into the life of a woman that many of us have only interacted with between the black and white lines of newspaper headlines. Conversations with Zondiwe aims to capture the joys, growing pains, hopes and shortcomings of an exceptional figure in Malawi's political and academic history and to begin to highlight and celebrate the achievements of our strong female leaders while they are still here to smell the roses.

Conversations with Zondiwe is the story of a fearless leader told through the lens of a young woman who has found within her deep and assertive voice, vibrant kaftans and unrelenting passion for feminist leadership and Pan African thought a mentor, a role model and a fellow woman with whom to relate.

This excerpt is adapted from the unpublished conversations between Dr. Jessie Zondiwe Kabwila and Tawonga Msowoya.

### If somebody said, who are you?

I am a woman who has spent her whole life fighting female oppression.

I know I have fought different kinds of oppression but what looms large is my fight against patriarchy. My fight against the male supremacy principle that says men are superior and women are inferior. Jessie is also somebody who is a very proud unianist. I believe in land rights a lot and [...] a lot of what I stand for you could find it a lot in the left. I have my issues with capitalism big time.... and neoliberalism. I have my issues with that.

But if somebody asked and said who is Jessie, I would say am: a freedom fighter; a child of somebody, a daughter and I would also say to a large extent that Jessie is a very proud African. Pan Africanism is something that I am very very proud of, In fact, I think I go beyond just being a Pan African. I have a raging war with neo colonialism. I am somebody who believes in black pride and making sure that the pathology attached to black people is not... should not continue. A pathology that I think has been helped a lot by religion and I think the way that western organized religion has been structured and its roots.

So in a nutshell let me say, I think I will not be doing a disservice if I say Jessie is a well-educated woman: I hold a PhD in feminist theory. None of my degrees are . . .

handouts. They have not been given to me and I have not been given a degree by anybody. I studied for them and I am very proud of them as my achievements. I think the story of my life has been me, being a threat to the powers that be. But then I also know that when you are powerful, don't expect people to clap hands as you rise. I take the challenges that come as challenges that illustrate just how hard I am working. So in the long and short, I think that's who I am: A proud warrior and a feminist to the core.

A very proud Malawian and again, a feminist to the core.

If we talk about my adolescent years, I will tell you about something that stands out to me.

I think it's been my fight on weight.

I grew up a dark, black, fat girl with a deep voice who is very assertive and is often accused of not being a woman and being a man in all that I do. I grew up in Zimbabwe because my parents had to leave Malawi due religious persecution; when Jehova's witnesses were expelled from this country and told to leave if they did not buy party cards under the MCP regime. So, I was growing up in Zimbabwe where I found myself as a foreigner. They used to call us Mavakure and the next time I went to Botswana I was being called Mkwerekwere: One of things I had to grow up with was being "othered"- being seen as a foreigner wherever I was.

When I was growing up, it was a time when people were very much in love with slim people. It was called an English figure: You had to be light in complexion; You had to be thin. And that was the figure in fashion.

And I was the complete opposite.

People would look at me and they thought I was older than my age and it used to depresss me. Teachers would make jokes, and they didn't understand how much they would demoralize you.

But I reached a point when I went through all these things;

I tried to diet, I tried to jog. I tried to do whatever until I had to reach a point where I had to be comfortable with who I am.

Comfortable in my own skin.

I had to reach a point of saying, look, this is Jessie and whoever does not like what she looks like can close their eyes. And I made a decision that I was not going to get into any other diet, and I was going to be comfortable in my own skin and arrive home to who I am, who is me.

I have never been slim; I am big bodied, whatever they call fat and this is who I am. I had to reach a point that I was comfortable with myself. And I always say that the hardest journey I have fought in my life is this journey to myself. And when I arrived at a point where I was comfortable with who I am, I stopped chasing the wind. So to me, the greatest journey of my adolescent years was to stop chasing men to define me and to define who I am, but to define myself, and say this is who I am and the world can do what it wants to do.

If I am to borrow Oprah Winfrey's words, it allowed me to "exhale", and to stop this thing of wanting to be validated and to be appreciated by people.

Whenever we talk, it's important to pivot your audience.

And the person I am speaking to now, when I talk about university, I want to talk to that young girl who is not doing so well in studies. Struggling, and probably doesn't think they are intelligent. They probably don't think they are good at sciences and they don't believe they are college material.

I went to college, after several trials of what you would call MSCE here. Remember I was in Zimbabwe.

I had written my O-levels and done what you would say is the equivalent of higher education. My parents were always very insistent that I should do my further studies back home because when we went to Zimbabwe, we quickly saw the quick linkage between citizenship, and the way you enjoyed the rights of the country.

My mother was one of the first people to be a principle at a college in Zimbabwe. But whatever she did, she was always reminded that she was a foreigner.

My dad was an accountant, a financial controller. But whatever he did, no matter how many hours he put in, he was always reminded

You are black, and you are a Malawian.

You are a foreigner.

So, [....] when I applied my results came out at form 4, and I had four distinctions [...] and four absolute failures.

And I needed 6 subjects to make it.

In those days, with the education system of Kamuzu Banda, no matter who says what, I must say that it was very organized, because I remember the registrar, who was Mr. Mvalo, actually interviewed me in Zimbabwe, when my parents contacted them, they would go in foreign countries to go and scout for students to come back home. And I was told that no, apply, but we will tell you outright that you don't have enough subjects.

I went to night school; I did private tuition until I got it. And I actually went for 2 trials.

I am saying this because sometimes when girls get pregnant or girls don't make it first trial, they have a tendency of giving up. Today, I am a doctor, but I actually came through what you would say a "patching system"; I had to take my O-levels patch them with my night school, and even when I went to night school, I did not get it the first time.

I had to go again

When my dad was sending me to university he actually said "I want you to go to the university, and I want you to go for one reason; I want you to discover who you are. I want you to know who you are because here we might be shielding you, but there,

there if I am able to lend a hand.

So my journey to the university has not only been an eye opener but something that gave me the capacity to stand on my own two feet at any time. But I would say that it has helped me to acquire tools with which to serve this nation.

So university; for me, this is the place that I would like every young girl to go. Why is it so important?

I think it's only there when you are set free:

and you are able to interact with a community of people and stand your ground to say do I want to go the great hall or not? Do I want to go to class or not? Do I want to sleep? Not because so and so said so, but because that's what makes YOU.

In fact, I still remember my first Disco:

It was done by Dave Mafoleka at that time, and as a Mboni [Jehova's Witness] child who had never been out and had lived a sheltered life. I remember I attended a disco, the first one, freshman's; I just went there and I did not leave at the time that everyone else was leaving because I just wanted to see how does it feel to be out this late and not have somebody saying to me

"eh eh kagoneni, kagoneni!".

For me, university enhanced the skills that my parents had given me, and I also got a chance to interact with this on my own and in my own space and to say "I agree with this. I don't agree with this" or "I'm going to continue this, or I'm going to stop this"

This passage is an excerpt from the unpublished Conversations with Zondiwe



### SHE STILL DREAMS

A question arose about who they should educate

Her parents made a choice that sealed her fate

Other girls have walked in her shoes and they can relate

Her brother would go on with school while for her they found a mate

A story was told about the little girl who was sexually abused Her innocence was forcibly stolen and she was misused Justice has not been faced by the accused And some even blame her and say he was seduced

A decision was made of how deserved promotion Even though she works so hard that she can build a nation She did not anticipate the blatant discrimination She was overlooked and it felt like a demotion

A board was set up and the statistics were alarming She was not the only one seeing what she was seeing Though dominated by males she still was participating Her views often sidelined but she kept on expressing

She wondered why her decisions were taken lightly

And why his decisions were always taken seriously

She knew she had been blessed with the same mental faculties

She dreamed of a day when her choices would be welcomed happily

She knows her choice to stay in school rattled feathers

She studies under the midnight lamp and braces for the cold weather

The results came out and she impressed all her teachers

She still dreams she will one day be a great achiever.

by Mwayi Angel Kapetala

Ta Lirima!





Such, is the misfortune of our kind:

To be born and raised with the semi-divine ability to carry and nurture life yet throughout our own existence, to have the life sucked out of us by those we allow to cross our paths.

Ours are days, weeks, months and years spent in the clutches of the serpent, living out a curse placed upon all who look, sound, smell, feel and taste like Eve.

We are descendants of others like us. Daughters of mothers who worshipped on their backs,

day and night sending prayers to gods who did more receiving than giving.

We have always been the lamb fattened for the slaughter.

prepared from birth to feed the big bad wolf and stuffed full with promises of a happy marriage if we act like the right woman.

We come from a long line of burnt sacrifices, of long skirts and chitenjes and mipango meant to appease our masters.

And our masters are not easily appeased. We answer to jealous gods.

Deities who lay claim to our bodies and refuse to afford us even a slither of godliness when we are the reason for their existence. Instead we beg and we plead and we walk on eaashells

in exchange for a bit of respect, a bit of love, a bit of esteem, a bit of life.

Because our gods decided they hold our lives in their hands.

Sometimes those hands beat our bodies like we are drums held between their legs, trying in vain to bring rain upon their barren lands.

Sometimes those hands are pressed against our mouths so we can't speak.

Sometimes those hands are wrapped around our throats so we can't breathe.

And sometimes they're clenched around our hearts so we can't live.

But we live, don't we?

With scratches on our cheeks and handprints on our cheeks

we live, don't we?

With blood on our thighs and a funny limp to our step

we live, don't we?

With voices hoarse from screaming and eyes swollen from crying

we live, don't we?

Constantly looking over our shoulders and afraid of the next corner

we live, don't we?

With sweaty palms in taxis and post offices

and our very own homes

we live, don't we?

With no one to tell our stories coz you won't

believe us, anyway we live, don't we?

But how long until the next one dies? How long until I'm the next one who dies?



I will not begin this letter with pleasantries and hellos, For I have seen, heard and touched the evil that resides within you.

The evil that hides behind a sly bearded smile and a ring of smoke disguised as a halo.

I have not come to seek closure, to retrieve an explanation, an excuse, a lie.

My words do not beg for your attention,

I do not need your approval to rip into you and lay you bare.

Just as you did not need my approval, my consent, to rip into me and lay me bare.

I have come to lay down this boulder of hurt, of shame, of hate.

It is no longer mine to toil with,

to labouriously carry up a mountain of emotional anguish,

just to watch it roll down into a river of tears.

I know that you do not know, but I have known for years. I know that you do not know, therefore I must tell you.

You are a rapist.

by wendy hara

MY STOR

by Sheleen Surti

# Like Nothing Happened.

Abuse is, as defined...the act of cruelty towards another, whether physically or mentally. It comes in different forms but with a common result: it leaves the victim bottered, either physically, mentally or indeed both. A destructive tool that individual's hinders an progress, self-esteem, trust in humanity and will power. Until one is psychologically healed, they shall remain in bondage, chained and deprived.

Yes, needless to say, the world is rampant with all sorts of abuse, horrible and chilling stories of abuse amongst mankind...my story does not come close to other stories of abuse but nevertheless, it leaves me pained, puzzled, angry and resentful.



Widowed at the age of **31** with a one-year-old doughter, my world shattered. So many questions went unanswered as the death was sudden and events surrounding it are still unclear. I questioned my creator "why, why, why?" what would I do now?

My child is now fatherless; how will I raise her?

We must leave this home, where do we go?

For an entire year after my spouse's death I functioned in a daze, simply doing what I had to on a daily basis. I was both emotionally drained and weak. Every day I thought to myself, "What can I do to dig myself out of this hole" I had no plan and everything seemed pointless.

Eventually my good friends who were always there for me got me to socialize again. My late spouse's family offered me a small job at their factory and I decided to enroll at a local college to study Business Management. Going to school kept me occupied and gave me back some hope for the future. It was exciting and I was living again! I gave it my all-it kept me sane, it kept me energized.

Where would I be without my parents? My parents insisted I move in with them as living alone with a child was unsafe and clearly I could not afford it. I gladly accepted and felt safe: We were home with family. I went to school whilst my daughter attended playschool and later an nursery school.

My final year of college had come and graduation was at Leeds Metropolitan University as the college I attended was affiliated to them. I had made it! I was so proud of myself and I made mum proud too! She bought tickets to the United Kingdom for my doughter and I and we went to my graduation at Leeds Met. When my name was called upon, I felt like a proud peacock walking on that stage to collect my degree. It was mine, I earned it and nobody could take that from me! And my baby girl was there to witness this and needless to say, the warm tears rimmed my eyes. In all my years of life, I have to say this was one of the proudest moments of my life and after two wonderful weeks in the United Kingdom visiting family and sightseeing, we returned home happy and hopeful.

Back home I got another job with family and tried to be the best mother I could be. With help from my spouse's family and my own family, my daughter was sent to a good school and she had everything she wanted, except her dad. We were settled: We lived in a beautiful home with my mum and Kat had her tight circle of friends who she went to school with since nursery.

I eventually decided to start up my own business: an entertainment place with a bar and restaurant to cater for events. Financial investment was not anything I could manage and again my mother was there to help. She loaned me the money I needed to get the business on its feet and I was a proud owner of a club in town. At this time, I also decided to go back to school and pursue a Masters in Business. I juggled my life between being a mother, running a business and attending my classes which were obviously academically demanding, but hey, in two or three years I would have my Masters degree, my daughter would be done with high school and we would leave for abroad, where the grass is said to be greener. We had a plan, we had direction and it was attainable in just a matter of time and hard work.

Being a Christian, I often hear the saying "the devil comes to steal, kill and destroy". In my case this scene was coming to play in my life.

Mum's home is never short of visitors and whether they are friends or family, there are always people in and out of her home. One of these is an old family friend who came to visit. Being brought up in a typical African tradition, I played hostess to mum's guests, serving them and waiting on them to make them feel at home. Minutes before the guest left she called me aside and told me she has a brother who lives in another country and he needs a wife. He is divorced, has children and is lonely so he needs a good woman to settle down with. She told me she felt I was the right woman for him and I should give it a thought. Naturally I was taken aback and was surprised as I never saw it coming! But of course my immediate reaction was "HELL NO!!" It wasn't even something I would waste my time pondering on: This wasn't an option at all.

The next day this lady returned to our home and asked if I had thought about it. I said I didn't know her brother at all and lied that I would think about it. She said she would call me in a few days' time to check with me. There I was thinking mmmh, I won't have to deal with the issue anymore but I was wrong. Two days later she called to ask what I thought and continued to tell me she had spoken to him about me and he wanted to see pictures of me.

"He is a good man; he will take care of you and your daughter".

"I am still thinking, give me time" I responded. What do I do now?

I called an aunt and explained everything to her. She told me she knew the man and he seemed to be an honest and mature man who would be good for me and I should consider it because I have been way too fussy and picky in the past and besides I needed to be independent and have my own family and home. She made sense. Indeed, it was high time I left mum's home, high time I had my own family and high time I stopped being too judgmental about men! I say this because this man was not a looker in my books, no way! Definitely not what I would go for: A total downgrade for me in the looks department compared to my late spouse! Besides, he was about eighteen years older than me. So having considered everything carefully I decided to give it a

shot. I told my family what was going on and he came over to my home and met the family, explaining his good intentions for Kat and I. All were happy, nicely comfortable in a pack of lies!

Our relationship began with him living in his country whilst I remained in mine. His sister was over the moon and she embraced me into their family. I travelled to be with him and he also flew in to be with me several times. Somehow the relationship was rocky and I put it down to the distance and not to the fact that he was seeing another woman. Over two years we broke up and made up several times and of course when he made up with me he had barrels of honey pouring out of his lying mouth! He always seemed to have the perfect excuse for bad behavior and it all made sense to little guillible me at the time.

Eventually after a long break up he came back into my life with a marriage proposal. His sister spoke to my mother on his behalf and promised a loving, happy home for my daughter and I. Needless to say, mum was very skeptical but I assured her we would be fine. Within a week this man had me advertise my business for sale, give up my classes which I was well into and withdraw my daughter from the school she was attending. All this because I was promised a new life elsewhere; a new business in the country I was moving to; my daughter in a school there; a happy home and everlasting love. So, business sold, car sold, clothes and belongings given away, child taken out of school, I was ready to leave my home country with two suitcases and my daughter.

"Wait," he said, "the child can come after a month. It gives you time to sort out a school for her". It broke my heart to tell Kat that mum would be going ahead to set up home for us with the man I was going to marry. It was emotional for us all but eventually we agreed that he would come, we get married then I go with him to his country and my daughter follows a month later. He did come, we did get married legally, although it was never the kind of ceremony me and my family had wished for me. It was a ceremony held at the registrar's office and a small lunch thereafter which most of my family failed to attend as dates and everything were changed so as to expedite the marriage. The reason for this still baffles me.

He insisted I quickly get a new passport in my new married name, I obliged and did it. Bear in my mind that I did the respectful thing and spoke to my late spouse's family and told them I would be leaving with my daughter and she will be taken care of by my new husband. They wished me well and we parted cordially as civilized and well mannered people do.

Two weeks later I tearfully left the home and daughter I adore to make a new home with my frog in shining armor!

Once there I realized it wasn't for me. My days were miserable, living with a self centered, disrespectful man who had his people groveling over him even when he is rude and ill-mannered. This is because he is wealthy and his family all ate his crumbs. They pretended every rude gesture he made was cute and nobody dared advise him on his faulty ways because he might not give them crumbs. This was not what I grew up with: this was uncivilized and ugly. Anyway, I was there and determined to slowly correct things.

I stayed at home while he went to work every day (again, I was not used to this). After two weeks I told him we need to find a school for my daughter but he came up with all the excuses under the sun. I asked him what business he intended to open for me seeing as I sold mine back home, his answer was

"not now".

"Ok then, seeing as I don't have a business anymore I would like to work and go back to school because I like to be independent" I said.

"No woman of mine works!" was the response.

I was frustrated and angry; lonely and miserable; regretful and unhappy.

Upon discussing my child's school again, I was bluntly told to go back to her father's family and ask them to pay her fees. How do I even think of going back to my late spouse's family and asking them to pay my daughters fees when I had told them not to warry about school fees anymore? The realization felt like an uppercut to my jaw and I was reeling from the intense realization that I had made a big mistake.

After a month I came back home to supposedly apply for a visa to live in his country and collect my daughter to take her with me, despite the misery I would be living in. You make your bed you lie in it right?

Three days after being back home I get a text message telling me to get a divorce lawyer as he no longer wanted to continue with the marriage and he could not provide me with my needs. Please remember that I sold my business and car, I gave up my school, I withdrew my child from school and I gave away all personal belongings before I left home to be with him. Please remember I was promised a new car, a business and school for my child. Naturally, I was in shock and thought it was a mere overreaction on his part and he would come to his senses in a few days. To my greatest dismay, a few days later his sister called me to confirm that her brother wanted the marriage dissolved. In this time I was still afraid to tell mum everything but after some time I had the painful task of explaining what had happened. I need you to understand the pain, the shame, the disrespect, the humiliation, the anguish my family and I were experiencing. The pain it caused me to tell my child what was going on is something that still tears me up. She too, had already told her friends she was leaving and had made little parcels of her belongings to give her friends as forewell gifts. Not only that, I now had to gather up the courage to sheepishly go back to my daughters' uncles and ask for financial assistance for her schooling again! But blessed as I am, they simply accepted us back and expressed the doubts they had had in the beginning, soying

"we knew it wouldn't work with him. You are different, and you were raised differently".

They obviously knew something I didn't at the time.

Within days, my personal belongings I had left in my marital home were sent back to me on a cargo truck, my husband married his ex girlfriend and she had already moved in. Yes, not yet divorced but hey why not?

Two years later, how do I feel about this?

I have been right in the core of a rough high-soaring whirtwind, feeling disheveled, bruised, stripped and stilly dizzy from the horrible spin.

I still believe this man's purpose was to seek and destroy me; born to ruin my life. His actions are unfathomable, cruel, disruptive and life altering to me and my family.

Here I am, still trying to pick up the pieces of my life, back in mum's house with no business or job, no upkeep for two years while the frag lives on happily and freely, like nothing happened!



# "How leaking of my private contact data triggered an avalanche of online abuse". - Bridget Oscar Phiri

It was some time in 2018 during my final year at university. I had just been selected as the first female Entertainment Director of the Catholic University of Malawi. A new academic year had just begun, and the annual ritual of a typical show to welcome the first-year students was on, under my responsibilities.

### Attempted collective response

All the young women that were targeted in the contact leakage formed a WhatsApp group to demand an explanation from the young man. He then released a video apology claiming that the contacts had been exposed as part of a 'truth or dare' game with friends who urged him to share the contacts of all women in his phone.

I wasn't satisfied with his explanation because my reputation had been ruined, and the mental torture this exposure brought had been enormous. The Young Feminist Network issued a support letter condemning the actions and also linked us to relevant authorities in the police, Malawi Human-Rights Commission and legal practitioners.

Personally, I wanted justice - and I tried to seek it. But the police declined, insisting this was a violation against a group of people; therefore, it needed several victims to come forward and accuse the young man for the case to be registered. Once the police turned me down and demanded a group report or no justice, most of the other young women dropped off. I remember once on the WhatsApp group someone said, "if he gets arrested, you guys will feel guilty for the rest of your lives. His future will be ruined, and I do not want to be a contribution to that."

The case was dropped because very few of us were willing to stand up against him. It was not, and it still is not easy to know I wasn't accorded justice. It bothers me to this day. A day does not go by without me receiving 3-5 messages on WhatsApp from strangers- and they are all male. The harassment continues, so I just block them.



Online violence has a daunting psychological impact on victims, even more so, because it's more than a one-time event.

You are continually bullied and harassed long after the first exposure and justice is another long interminable wait. I remember one of us actually attempted suicide through a drug overdose as they struggled to cope with this leaking of their contact and the accompanying bullying and harassment. Her parents did not believe her story when they came across the contact list from a church group. Reporting such violations against women remains a tall order. The police make it difficult for victims of online violence to report. Without organizing and pushing from legal practitioners and human rights movements, individuals who face these violations face limited recourse. Meanwhile, the public remains unaware of the gravity of these crimes and as a result, the victim-blaming continues. Holding the violators accountable and ensuring comprehensive psychosocial support for victims remains a far cry for many.

This article has been published before by African Feminism in May, 2020.

I was in charge of registering those interested in performing in the show, which meant that my phone number appeared on each and every poster announcing the event. I received calls and messages from different people and never once thought that to share my phone number with the public would bring me any trouble.

The show was successful, and we were now a few months away from end of semester examinations. Then, on one night after my group discussions at around 9:00 pm, I received about 4 phone calls from different unknown numbers. They were all men or at least sounded like men. They all asked how much I would charge for them to have sex with me.

### Public shaming and harassment on and offline other".

I was shocked and angry. These calls literally came one after the other.

It didn't make sense. I walked back to my room thinking maybe it was all a prank orchestrated by some of my friends. Once back in the room, I sat down and opened my WhatsApp to find a flood of nasty messages from different numbers, both national and international. Men from different parts of the world had access to my number and I didn't understand how it had happened. Some even sent me pictures of their penises, It was a traumatizing experience.

Shortly after my family members and friends started to call wondering why the number was being circulated. That's when I learnt that my phone number had been put together with other 245 contacts of young women all unknown to each other, and subsequently leaked into one WhatsApp group.

People labelled us, added us to different WhatsApp groups and called us all sorts of names. Messages kept flooding my inbox in the form of "I want to sleep with you," "how much for a night?" "Send me naked pictures of yourself." I didn't know how to feel. Even those within my close circle had different reactions and social media was a storm: We were being bullied on social platforms. The 246 contacts were labelled 'the easiest young women/girls to sleep with or to have a good time.'

It was not only a blatant breach of privacy but also defamation of character and reputation. I didn't know who had done it and who to report to. I deleted my WhatsApp that night because I couldn't stand the messages anymore. However, the bullying outside the online world didn't stop. At the university, everyone gave me looks. There was a lot of chatter with "there is no smoke without fire." I later learned that I wasn't the only person whose number had been leaked at the campus. Still, I was definitely well-known because of my role as the entertainment director in the students' union so I couldn't run away from it all.

A few days later, I went back to my WhatsApp, and this time it got worse. The men had even switched to video calling me. Our contacts had also been circulated on other platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook and the bullying became worse on social media. My family was also affected and many of them not willing to hear or listen to my side of the story. My boyfriend ended our relationship in the midst of this. It was an emotionally exhausting place.

I was determined to not be pushed off my number and the app, so I started blocking the unknown numbers once they called or texted. It was a huge workload and mentally exhausting. Since the contacts were being circulated on different platforms and this became a big topic around the nation.

Finally, the Young Feminist Network WhatsApp group, which I was already part of, brought it up. The network seeks to create a safe space for Malawian youth to dialogue on gender issues, human rights and to engage in activism for social justice. YFN's intention was to know and understand what had happened and how our numbers were leaked. From this group alone, I met about six other victims under the 246 contacts. It is here that for the first time, I found positive energy from the members. They encouraged us not to panic after several weeks of torment.

Weeks later a young man confessed on Twitter with his apology claiming the leaking of the 246 contacts as unintentional. Once screenshots of his tweet and his pictures circulated, it turned out he was one of the performers at the first years' show I worked on. He clearly had accessed my number as he was registering.

Before this violation, I was aware of cyber bullying being illegal in Malawi, but I knew it was an issue that often isn't taken seriously. I had never heard or seen any case of someone being arrested because they were violent towards someone online. Yet it was and still is very common.

# WOMEN IN RELIGION

by Singalilwe Chilemba

While the subject of women and religion was not one of the areas of focus in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. there is no question that religion plays a vital role in shaping our cultures. It is therefore important to explore not only the role that women play in religion and how this may have changed over the years, but to also look at how this influences our position as a society when it comes to issues of gender equality.



I sat down with Dr Phoebe Chifungo, a Malawian lecturer at African Bible College who holds a master's degree in Theology and a PhD in Practical Theology, to look at the role of women in religion, what the main challenges are as well as how they can be addressed.

### yourself and your background

Dr Chifungo: I'm Dr Phoebe Faith Chifungo, coming from a Christian background. I'm from the North - but I'm now married to Reverend Chifungo, the former General Secretary of Nkhoma Synod. We have three children, all girls. I did my bachelor's degree at African Bible College (ABC), My master's Degree and PhD are from Stellenbosch University in Cape Town, South Africa. I'm currently working as an adjunct lecturer at ABC and University of Livingstonia for the master's Programs.

S. Chilemba: Thanks, that's a very interesting background and one of the reasons you came recommended as someone we could talk to on the topic of women in religion. We want to hear from you regarding your thoughts on

#### S. Chilemba: So, tell us a bit more about the role of women in religion as it currently stands in Malawi.

Dr Chifungo: The role of a woman in religion, if we were to tackle both Islam and Christianity - I look at them as decision makers. I've said this because you find that in both Christianity and Islam, the majority in the church and mosque are women. Unfortunately, most of the times they are not involved in the decision making, so it's only men who are making decisions for women and sometimes it doesn't really work because those who are in the majority are not included. So, to me, as far as the bible is concerned the most important role is the decision making. Another role from a biblical perspective - I see a woman as a great intercessor. If you go to the bible, the number one person who attracts my heart is Anna, in the book of Luke chapter 2. She spent much of her time in

the temple, interceding for the coming of the messiah. So, I see a woman as a great intercessor. The second one is Esther. When the Jews were about to be executed, Esther understood her role as a woman and interceded by praying and fasting. She even asked the rest of the Jews to intercede.

Dr Chifungo: They also have this role of evangelising or preaching. I've only talked about the church and in religion. Take the example of how the first people who were there when Jesus rose from the dead were women. Men went into hiding – talk of Peter who was always there with Jesus, he went into hiding because he was afraid. But women were so courageous, they were not afraid, and they were the first people to evangelise that Jesus Christ has risen. So, the first is the role of leadership, intercession but also evangelism or preaching.

S. Chilemba: That's very clear in terms of the role that women can play in religion. You've mentioned leadership, intercession and evangelism. How do you think that this has been demonstrated in the past 25 years when you look at the history of the church? What are the changes that you can see now in comparison?

Dr Chifungo: It goes both ways. In some religions it has changed, but in others it hasn't changed. In some other religions there's only a slight change. You see that in the past most religions never considered women to be ordained, even to take up leadership roles in the church. But now if you go to Pentecostal churches especially, for most of them this is no longer a big issue. They are ordaining women who are taking up leadership roles. I'm a Presbyterian; if you go to Blantyre and Livingstonia synod, they also ordain women as pastors. But Nkhoma synod has not yet reached that level. That's why I say that for some, there's slight change, not a hundred percent but there's positive change where women are now being considered to partake in leadership roles. For others such as Roman Catholic, Islam and some Presbyterian churches - it's still a taboo. You can't talk of a woman taking up leadership roles to the extent of being ordained. That's why you haven't heard a nun or sister being ordained to relevant roles. So yes, while some religions have changed, there is still a long way to go. Even in the cases where there are some changes, you still see that the leadership roles being given to women are not a hundred percent. You talk of Blantyre and Livingstonia synod or even Pentecostals. I have never heard of a woman being given the position of General Secretary or Moderator. They are given Deputy Moderator and other low positions, not the key ones. So, there's still a long way to go.

Dr Chifungo: On how I think this can be changed - number one, there's a need for a change in perception of how the church - or religion - perceives a woman. In most cases, a woman is perceived as taking a secondary role. They should perceive a woman as somebody who is created in the image of God. Capable of executing or fulfilling that which God has given her, including these leadership roles. The church and religion need to understand that even a woman is created in the image of God and such being the case, God has given her a power to fulfil on this earth. Secondly, there's a need that a woman should be fully empowered and encouraged. Culturally, even from the religious point of view, a woman has been considered as very low. Her place is considered to be in the kitchen. She has been reduced to a childbearing machine, that the number one responsibility of a woman is producing children. Her place is in the home; she can't rise beyond that. So, we need to change that mentality and on the other hand, women need to be encouraged because we have been brought up with that mentality. You know when a child is born, even when we talk about buying toys, a baby boy will get a toy car or gun. A girl will get a doll or a pot. So, a girl grows up with that mentality that my place is in the kitchen and she is a child bearer. You can't encourage a woman in such a way. She needs to be encouraged and told that she is also created in the image of God and can therefore do greater things.

### S. Chilemba: That's very well put. What would you say are the major challenges in achieving this?

**Dr Chifungo:** Mainly there are two – first is the wrong interpretation of the scripture. The second is culture. Because when you talk about religion, many churches that are hindering women from taking up leadership roles use the bible. They quote some of the verses, such as 1 Corinthians 14:34 [34Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. - NKJV]. 1 Timothy 2:12-13 [12And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13For Adam was formed first, then

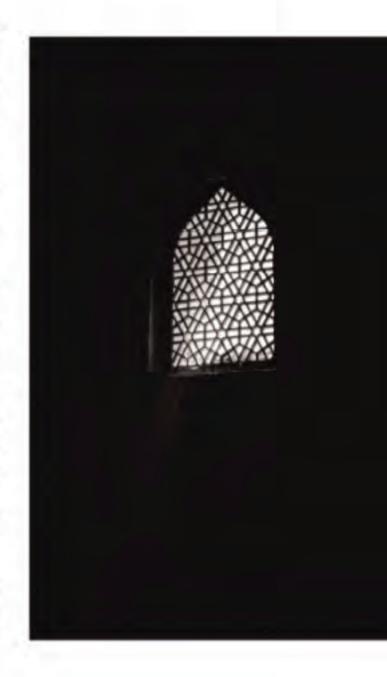
Dr Chifungo: They are using these scriptures which is wrong interpretation. In order to overcome that there is need for a right interpretation of the word of God. They need to understand what Paul meant when he said that women should keep quiet. They shouldn't just take one verse and start running with it that women shouldn't take up leadership roles.

Dr Chifungo: Another one is the culture. This is what I've just talked about in the example of toys that are given to children and how a woman is perceived as a low person.

S.Chilemba: In terms of empowering these young women and girls as one way to drive change, how exactly can we go about it through the church and religion?

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S. Chilemba: In terms of empowering these young women and girls as one way to drive change, how exactly can we go about it through the church and religion?

Dr Chifungo: Number one, they need to be encouraged from the word go. Let me start with girls. They need to be taught the right interpretation of the word of God. Girls need to be taught that they are created in the image of God and they have been given a mandate to execute while they are still here on earth. When they grow up with this image, they will know that 'I am highly esteemed by God'. You know, culture has brought an inferiority complex into many young girls. A girl child grows up thinking they cannot achieve something or go further with their education, cannot obtain a good job or excel in business. That mentality needs to be changed from the word go. further with their education, cannot obtain a good job or excel in business. That mentality needs to be changed from the word go. She should know that since she is created in the image of God, he will help her to carry out the same things that men are carrying out.

Dr Chifungo: : Number two is that they need to be encouraged to work hard in school. Inasmuch as the world nowadays is trying to empower women, for instance in Malawi we talk of the 40:60 policy in the Gender Equality Act where it says that when it comes to employing people, either men or women shouldn't be less than 40% and not above 60%. Even in that capacity, they will not leave out the issue of merit. They will not employ someone just because she is a woman and be given the position of CEO. Even in the church, they can't just say because you're a woman then we're going to give you this leadership role. You're supposed to perform. So, I'd encourage girls and young women to work hard in class and go further with their studies. Don't just say I've got a form 4 certificate or a degree. They should always aim high, because when it comes to these leadership roles, they will also consider the issue of merit, it's not just about being spiritual. When it comes to employment or even giving leadership roles in the church. the spiritual aspect is there but they will consider how far a woman has gone with her education. So, let's encourage girls to work hard and young women to go back to school so that they can go further with their education. For those doing business and can't go back to school, I'd encourage them to have a hardworking spirit. God is not going to rain blessings just like that. I don't believe in this gospel where they just say "I receive, I receive". I'd rather encourage young women to pray and work hard. Then they are going to see what God is going to do. They have a role to play, and God has got another role so we shouldn't be confusing these two things. But yes, they should put God first, that's number one. They say that 'the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom'. When you put aside God everything is ruined.

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S. Chilemba: Thank you for those points in terms of exactly where we can begin to empower young women and girls to take up leadership roles and generally do well in life. On the same issue of empowering women, it's a popular perception that you can't mix gender activism with religion. It doesn't seem compatible to be at the forefront of fighting for women's rights while you are a Christian. I wanted to hear your thoughts on that and how we can pair these two aspects, if at all.

Dr Chifungo: That's wrong. If they say it's not compatible to me that's one hundred percent wrong. Because when we talk about gender issues, the first ones who are supposed to take this responsibility of empowering women is the church and religion. That's their number one responsibility. When you talk of these other organisations which have come up to empower women and encourage gender equality, they are there because the church has failed. They are there just because religion has completely failed and that's why they've taken up that role, but it's supposed to be taken up by the church because this is biblical. You know when you go to the bible, you're talking of equality which is a biblical issue. The bible says, Galatians 3:28 [28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - NKJV] - it's straight forward. So, when we talk about gender equality, it's a biblical issue. These things are compatible, and it should be seen like that. From the biblical point of view, we are all equal so the church and religion should take this message. They are the ones responsible to carry it out. Saying it's not compatible is a hundred percent wrong. It's just unfortunate that the church has been quiet, that's why the organisations have taken the responsibility of the church and are rising up. And then it's unfortunate that they have also gone to another extreme, because they don't really understand the bible so they have gone to different extremes which is why maybe they say it's not compatible but to me, the church should take that responsibility and it should not be given to other organisations. Even when you go to Genesis chapter 1:27, it says: 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. [NKJV] - you can see that from the word go, God is talking about equality.

S. Chilemba: Before we go further, you've mentioned the other organisations that come in and perhaps because they are misguided and don't know much about the word of God, they are going to other extremes. Please expand a bit more on that and the extremes that we might see.

**Dr Chifungo**: (laughs) yes, they've gone to the further extreme, number one - they've even gone to the extent that God himself takes the pronoun of 'she'. That one to me is very extreme. Another aspect is that God is a God of order. He created marriage and in that marriage, there are orders which God has put; first there's Christ, then the husband, then the wife and then children. To the husband he said "the way Christ took care of the church, in the same manner you husband take care of the wife." And then the bible says to the wife "submit yourself to the husband." Now in terms of extremities, many women think that once they have been empowered perhaps in terms of finances, they stop being respectful to the husband. They stop being submissive to the husband. Husbands have been considered as nobodies in the homes just because they have been empowered. That's very bad and not biblical. No matter how I'm being empowered, even financially, or if I take up a leadership position, that doesn't change the fact that I'm a wife and still need to submit myself to my husband. Even if he's not working. These are the areas I was referring to.

S. Chilemba: Thank you for that clarification. We've talked a lot about the change we would like to see, not only in religion but also culturally. Focusing on the religion aspect, who exactly should be at the forefront of driving the change we want to see that will benefit young women and girls, within religious institutions but also as a culture.

Dr Chifungo: To me, I think the leadership should take that role. I don't know if you mean in terms of either women or men but in terms of institutions and culture, it should be the leadership. I'll give you an example... several churches have their own disciplines. Presbyterians, the ones who are in control are the church leaders and not the pastor or reverend. For change to take place, it takes the leadership to sit down and make a decision. If the leadership can't take that role it means the change is not going to happen. Even when we talk about culture, that also has to do with leadership, but I will talk mainly about mindset. There's a need to change our mindset. Culturally, because we are brought up to think that a woman is nobody, a woman is just a child bearer. That mindset needs to change, but the custodians of changing that culture still goes to the leadership of that culture. Because whatever the church leadership or the leadership in culture decide to change, that takes place. Even in church, I'll give you a good example of my own church - Nkhoma synod. They decided at a certain point that women should start preaching. They agreed as leaders, the reverends and church elders and it started. Up to now, women are preaching. The leadership hasn't yet decided that women should become pastors, no matter how much we try on the ground we are still waiting for the leadership to make that decision. So yes, I think the leadership holds the keys for these changes to take place both in the religious institutions and in culture.

5. Chilemba: In religious institutions we can see the clear lines of leadership but as a culture, who would we turn to in terms of the leaders?

**Dr Chifungo:** To me with my little knowledge I think it's the traditional leaders, such as the Traditional Authorities (TAs), there's the group village headman and the ndunas. When these people sit down and agree on a decision, they pass that on to the rest of the village and they take it up.

### S. Chilemba: To close, do you have any message you would like to share for young women and girls in the country?

**Dr Chifungo:** For young women and girls I'd say number one, God first. Put God first, fear God entrust your ways in God and then everything is going to work out. Let's not put God aside. For girls, don't rush for anything else. Take hold of God, know Jesus Christ as your Lord and saviour and then everything you have, you'll be able to entrust it with him. Number two, work hard in school. Let's not be deceived by other things or boys, no. Let's put aside boys and work hard in school. Let's be focused and have a vision. A girl who has a vision will not get distracted by anything else because if a boy comes and says I want to sleep with you, the girl will be able to say "I've got a vision, and that's to go further with my studies." But a girl without a vision, anything can distract her. So have that vision, have goals, have values that "my body is a temple of God and therefore it's untouchable until I get married."

**Dr Chifungo:** As for the young women, as I said earlier on, go back to school and do further studies. If you're in business, work hard. Pa Chichewa amati kakudza kokha kamalaula. So let's work hard in whatever God has blessed us with whether it's business, and for those who can go back to school let's do that so that in the end no one should say "I could have given you this leadership position but because of merit, you don't qualify." It shouldn't be like that. Thank you.

#### S. Chilemba: Thank you very much for making the time to talk to us. We will pass on the message.



What are your views on the intersection between religion and women's rights? We want your voice to be heard. Email us your perspective and opinion at pepeta265@gmail.com

# tHE eND



It was a sunny morning, the birds were chirping and the children on their way to school: She could tell from the hustle and bustle outside, as mothers rushed to get their kids to the school bus parked, at the bus stage right in front of her house. She stood there looking outside the window, through the small part of the curtain. Perhaps it was the rage or sorrow inside her that made her do this. Anaika stood at the window every day, at the same time for almost 6 months without fail; she woke up, stood there and watched. It had become a ritual, a way of starting her day. Vuto, her husband, stirred in the bed besides her, restlessly turning from side to side. He was about to wake up, she thought to herself, as she turned back to her window. The bus pulled away and the mothers retreated back to their homes. She opened the curtains of the room letting the sunlight in, walking to the kitchen, turning on the gas stove and putting a pot of water on it for the morning tea.

Vuto woke up to the sun in his face. He sat up on the bed and went to close the curtain. Anaika had been there again. He had seen her earlier, as he had every day for the past 6 months. He knew why she did it but he didn't understand why. The first day, a couple months after the incident, he had woken up and found her there looking out the window in tears. At the time, he had asked her what she was doing; she had looked at him with such anger and hatred in her eyes, cursed him and turned back to the window. He had not bethered to ask her again. From then on, he continued to pretend to be asleep: It was easier that way. He wasn't sure if deep down she knew that he was watching her as she watched them and as the weeks passed by, he had stopped putting much effort into understanding her or getting through to her. He had tried to get the family involved: Her aunties had come to console her and to convince her that she should work on getting pregnant again, but she had given a blank stare as she had given him when he suggested it. She never spoke to him or their aunties again after that despite efforts from him and them.

He picked up his boxers that were lying on the floor of their bedroom and pulled them on, walked to the bathroom, brushed his teeth and washed his face. He walked to the kitchen to find his wife putting breakfast on the table: He sat down, grabbed the bread and began to eat.

She sat down as well and they sat there in silence, quietly eating their food as they always did.

Anaika looked at her husband. She stared at him for a long time thinking of the day they had gotten married. He had had a fresh haircut, the biggest smile on his face and he cried when he saw her all dressed up for the special occasion. She remembered the reception when their families showered them with money and wished them happiness, just two years ago. However, the man in front of her was a stranger. His beard had overgrown and his hair unkempt: The aunties would be disappointed in her for not taking care of him as was expected of her as an African woman. She never understood that. Why did she have to take care of a grown man? Why did she have to suffer and keep a marriage because she was a woman?

she have to suffer and keep a marriage because she was a woman? Why did she have to be strong even when things got unbearably hard? Why did she have to forgive and move on, not overreact while whatever he did was pardoned? It is how men are and therefore excusable?

She went back to sipping her tea contemplating everything, with her rage increasing with each question. When she looked up at him she found him staring at her as well, his eyes filled with sadness, regret, and anger. He opened his mouth to talk to her but she stood up and walked to the sink. She didn't want to speak to him. Not after what had happened.

He sat there watching her wash the same cup over and over. He had let this go on for far too long. Anaika and he had not said many words to each other since the incident and he didn't know how much longer he could bear the silence between them.

"Analka?" he asked, hoping that she would give him a response. She stopped washing the cup, putting it on the drying rack.

She grabbed another cup but she didn't respond.

"Ana, we have to talk. At some point we... we have to talk about what happened." Vuto pleaded.

"No. We don't." she responded with her back facing him.

"I am your husband. You have to talk to me."
She snickered at that remark and sharply turned to face him with tears forming in her eyes. She walked towards him and started grabbing things off the table. Vuto grabbed her hands to stop her.

"In the eyes of the law, God and our family, you are still my wife. I know what I did was unforgivable, I can't go back and fix it, but we need to make our marriage work. I can't live in the house with someone who refuses to acknowledge my presence. Someone who refuses to speak to me Ana please." Vuto looked at her hoping she would respond.

"You have tricked yourself to act like nothing happened, haven't you? You killed our unborn child Vuto!" she looked at him with disgust in her eyes.

"It was accident. I am sorry Ana. It was an accident... I didn't know... I was angry, you provoked me and I reacted... I didn't mean...I have apologized over and over again. It was my child too. I am in pain too." His voice slightly rose with frustration.

"Sorry? Will it bring our baby back? The baby you killed Vuto? You killed our baby because of anger, over what?"

Analka started hysterically laughing.
"It was an accident? Was it also an accident every time you raised your fist? The countless times I put up with your abuse

all, because of stupid tradition, in the name of saving my marriage because I didn't want to embarrass my family. Every time you apologized I thought you would be different. Even after that you had the audacity to tell me that we can make another one a month after, like it was nothing.

You're in pain? You acted like my baby was replaceable. You brought our family to tell me that I should get over it and focus on making you happy. Forgive you for laying a hand on me. Forgive you for kicking me till I had a miscarriage, like forgiveness and an apology would make it any better."

Anaika screamed.

Vuto stood there looking at her as she stared at him with tears in her eyes. "I will never forgive you for what you did. What you have done to me." Anaika cried, shaking with sadness and anger.

"You are a coward. You are a weak man who had to hit me to feel powerful, and that weakness cost me my child. I am done being afraid of you or of what my family or people will say. I am done with you. This marriage destroyed me and I have had

enough. Get out!"

Anaika went back to the sink not waiting for a response.

Vuto went to the bedroom, got dressed, grabbed a bag from the closet and began packing. He walked to the kitchen moments later. Analka was still washing the dishes, holding back the tears. He stood behind her, kissed the back of her head and walked out of the house with his bag.

Analka watched her husband walk away and broke down into tears of joy and sorrow; tears mourning her dead child and tears celebrating her new found peace. She walked to the door, closed it and with it closing a chapter of her life that had been filled with pain and unhappiness.

Anaika was finally ready to move on.





#### **DOORS OF POSSIBILITIES**

by Joyce Nyrongo



My name is Joyce Nyirongo. A
Malawian lady who lives in
Lilongwe. I have recently
completed a Master's degree in
Applied Parasitology from Kenyatta
University, Kenya.

My artwork comprises of both paintings and pencil drawings. The distinctly colourful paintings emanate hope and Joy-something I strongly believe in.

My submission was inspired by what I see as a representation of Africa. It portrayed strength, beauty, resilience and doors of possibilities.

## DEAR MOTHER



JOYCE NYIRONGO

## The Angry Feminist.



- with Lusungu Kalanga

I am angry.

First things first. Feminism is not misunderstood. Feminism is feared. It is feared because it calls for a shift in power. A disruption of the status quo. Same as other oppressive power structures like racism, homophobia, xenophobia; those who benefit from the status quo resist change because empowerment means relinquishing some power...make society more equal...God forbid!

As a feminist, I refuse to offer free labor to make people, especially men 'understand' feminism. As Audre Lorde wrote;

"Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the masters concerns."

As the per the title of this article, yes, I am angry.

The first google definition of anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility." Many times, I find this definition inadequate in describing how I feel. So, I call upon those who constantly call feminists angry to do better and find a more fitting word, a stronger word to describe our feelings towards oppression. It is also very interesting that People are angry at feminists for being angry and not at the oppression that makes us angry.

My feminism (and I am talking Black feminism) is all the rage and we need all the rage. Feminism gives us women a common language for thinking about how the patriarchy works to 'fuck shit up for everybody' (Brittney Cooper). Anger, the rage can be a powerful source of energy inserving progress and change. In this piece, I thought I would perform a bit of charity by writing about some reasons why I breathe fire, why I am enraged and unrelenting in the fight against the patriarchy. I am a black Malawian feminist and my lived experience is where I draw my anger from.

Society wants women to be understood. To be moderate. We can't be full human beings. Society cannot deal with our liminal complexity. From our early socialization, we are taught about virtue and prepared for marriage. While men are taught how to want and get, to speak up, to be served, to desire and take and to decide things on their own. To date, for those women who decide to enter marriage and have children, the blunt of child care falls heavily on them. There are so many stories of women giving up on their careersand being "strong" because of their children or to keep the peace in marriage. Women's suffering is romanticized and normalized as apart of our womanhood. For men, it is majorly not a consideration. Women are judged harshly for putting their careers first with questions like "upitaku school, anaakhalandindani?"that are laced with guilt tripping and the assumption that a woman must remain the primary caregiver at home

Many people argue that it is about value for money and productivity and I call BS on all those arguments. I imagine a world where men menstruated and gave birth. This would not even be up for debate. Additionally, there are some organisations that are walking the talk in women friendly policies and they are yet to claim losses. For instance, Action Aid Malawi has one of the most progressive women friendly maternity leave policy; paid leave is four months, women who have children under two years knock off at 4 and there is a crèche in the office in case you must bring your child to work.

13.

I will not get into the double standards of recruitment in organisations and companies where women must be extra-ordinary to compete for positions which require men to just be good enough. I will also not talk about how women have to sit through meetings where their views are disregarded until they are "hepeated" by mediocre men. Lastly, I will not talk about how I do not know a single working woman in my network who has never been sexually harassed at work. So you are right to say I am fucking angry!

Let us move to political participation of women in Malawi. I'm angry that women's stories continue to be erased. The secretaries who made major contributions to the freedom struggle. The women who mobilized against the one-party state...where are their holidays? When do we celebrate them? It is also very interesting to me how in this day and age, when a man fails, he is judged in his individual capacity but when a woman fails we still claim all women have failed. The best example is our former president Dr Joyce Banda. Because she was voted out, many people (read men and pick me women aka patriarchy princesses and gate keepers) bundled women as a homogenous group who had all failed. But I also find this argument factually untrue per Malawian standards and the presidents we have had so far. Did she really fail? Who are we comparing her to? I understand that we can't measure leadership based on other failures but neither should we base in on gender.

In the political space, violence against women is rife. Women's bodies are used to shame women into silence. Recently, when women mobilized in Malawi against political violence after a woman was stripped for wearing opposition party colors, the media centered a man in reporting this historic moment. Women who brave the hostile political space and run for public office are verbally harassed and intimidated and political parties continue to sideline women in crucial party positions.

I'm angry because in my every interaction with men. I have to hold my breath. I can't walk with the confidence that there will be no cat calling and objectification of my body. I'm angry because men in power feel entitled to my body. I angry at the ever-rising number of women who get killed in and out of intimate relationships with men who claim to have loved them. I'm angry because there are marginalized groups who still can't live freely in Malawi. The LGBTQI community, people living with albinism and people with disabilities continue to face discrimination in a country that they call home. In case you are wondering, feminism is a movement that cares not just about women but all marginalized groups. Additionally, it is the only movement that wants men to be set free from the bonds of patriarchy (yes men, you heard right, stop being trash!).

I am livid because what are supposed to be safe spaces for everyone like the church are the cause of hurt. The church, a place that is meant to bring hope is complicit in the protection and enabling of abusers. Instead of marching against women's bodily autonomy and the right to sexual orientation, they should be more vigilant in standing up for women and other vulnerable groups.

Ofcourse, there is always the "what about men" groups that interestingly speak up only when women are speaking against violence. It is hard to take you seriously If the only time you care about male victims of violence is when women speak up about their own victimization. Stop pretending to care about male victims when all you care about is preserving your ego, re centering men in the conversation, and shutting women up.

I would write a book if I had to share all the examples of why I am angry. Malawi in its patriarchal state now cannot be the society we can be empowered into as women. To empower ourselves- yes us women- and allies, we must dismantle the patriarchal structure and do nothing else. And we will use all means necessary. What better driver than anger to keep propelling us into forward action! It is important for men to understand that our tone will not be policed. Our tone does not invalidate our message. We will not be told how to express our anger, how to deal with our oppression and we definitely reserve our right to NOT negotiate in a nice tone with our oppressors. Our rights are not up for negotiation. Assata Shakur noted that:

"People get used to anything. The less you think about your oppression, the more your tolerance for it grows. After a while, people just think oppression is the normal state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave."

Malenga [mah-LEN-ga] Translation create (kie at)





My name is Linnie
Mbirimtengerenji, a twenty two
year old Malawian female in my
final year at Pentecostal Life
University studying Bachelor of Arts
in Public Administration.

I am a **creative**: I love to create, specifically sketch and paint. My art is committed toward showcasing the diversity of African cultures and the strength and beauty of the Black woman.

Black women regardless of their circumstance and society find themselves managing to be selfless, strong and ambitious holding their head high against all odds. I find them both inspiring and fascinating and my art is geared toward showcasing the Black woman's strength and will, but also vulnerability so the world can see and appreciate them through my eyes and art.







Cindy Chilimampunga is a Malawian Visual Artist based in Lilongwe. She graduated from Chancellor College in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities.

Cindy has participated in a number of exhibitions with WESM, Art and Global Health Center, an Instruct for 'Art & Sip' event with Tingathe Organization and was part of FEMINART in 2019.

She drew her inspiration from everyday issues that young women deal with and the choices they make, such as being trendy and fashion alert, freedom (which is defined differently from everyone), financial stability, finding real love, pursuingmhappiness & the current issue of the new Corona virus, among others.

Currently, she's teaching Art at Paramount Academy.



colors

Red has always been my favourite colour. Red like my mother's rose garden. Red like a great cherry flavoured lolly pop.

Red like my favourite dress. Red has always be a beautiful colour. He agrees. Red suits me, always has.

Red like the flood between my legs when he is done.

Red, like the stains on our bathroom tiles. Red like the colour of my eyes the morning after.

I like purple nearly as much. The colour of lavenders and lilacs. I read somewhere it was used by royalty in days of old, purple is nice too.

He is a king, it makes sense that he loves the colour too.
Purple like the bruises on the back of my legs.
Purple like what I hide behind my high end concealer.
Purple has six letters.

Six like the number of times I tried to call my best friend before I gave up.

Six like the number of sets of little eyes I never got a chance to see open.

Six, the number of stitches I needed after I "fell in the bathroom."

Yeah, purple is nice too.
I abhor white.

It stains too easily. Hard to hide blood stains and bruises.
It is the colour mother insisted I wear on my wedding day.
It is the colour of an innocence long forgotten. The colour of smiles. Of trust before the darkness.

The colour of the paper the doctor had written on to tell me there was a seventh and if I was lucky, perhaps I'd carry this one to term.

I've grown a new fondness for black.

Black looks good against my brown caramel skin as I cross the aisle to my place on the front pew.

It is the colour of the veil I must wear. The colour of my gloves as my fingers rest on my rounded belly.

The colour of the tux we're burying him in.

The colour of his beautifully carved casket. It is the colour of our freedom.

It was the colour of his soul. It is the colour of our freedom I think black might be the new red. Amayi Adja.

Amayi Awa.

Amayi awo.

mazwiedu

> Zimbabwe <

## Henvous condition

"the business of womanhood is a heavy burden. How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? [....] and these days it is worse with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength"

- Excerpt from Tsitsi Dangaerembga's Nervous Conditions













## Echoes From Departed Souls.

by Nkosiphile C. L Mhlanga

This photo essay was inspired by the urge to be a voice for the voiceless, for our departed heroines, mothers, sisters and friends who suffered and perished in the hands of those they loved. This piece strives to evoke and portray the reality of the uxoricide ( the killing of one's wife/girlfriend), which often presents itself as a beautiful love story in the beginning, but slowly turns sour and ferments into an intoxicating life, which results in death for a majority of our sisters.

ECHOES FROM DEPARTED SOULS serves to show that the fight has not ended the stories of our fallen heroes still resonate and echo, with hope of putting an end to the injustice and end to the numerous femicides we have witnessed since 1955.

#### by Sanelisiwe Muyambo

## Beautifully broken



Abuse may, Stain our entire existence. Break our bones But our voice grows feet to help us remain standing. Who has a VOICE and is using it.

photo courtesy of Diana Motsi

I was so overwhelmed with emotion that I couldn't even cry. Instead, I found myself in an all too familiar scene, gasping for air, my left hand on my chest trying to ease the pain and my right hand treaching out for the white and blue box which like my soul had been a part of me for as long as I could remember anything about my existence in this world. I was hardly ever aware of what I was doing until the feeling in my chest had eased after having shifted my pain to my wrist or my thighs. I never wanted to kill myself; at least that's what I thought. The unvarnished truth is that the pain I felt inside each time I got an anxiety attack was so

intense that I thought it would kill me. It was not just physical, but it was also mental pain which further broke my mind as memories of the past cascaded through it.

One, two, three.... eight;

the pain on my wrists was like being awoken from a deep slumber I had been failing to wake up from. I lay sprawled on the floor and watched the as white porcelain tiles turned sanguine. Tears started to fall, but they were not accompanied by any audible sound, yet the sound of the voices in my head was deafening.

Sibanda. psychologist, had truly been a Godsend. I was skeptical about going to her for help at first. Mv demons had overtaken me whilst I was busy trying to outrun them and this time around they hadn't just come for me but for the only person who had been willing to put on his boots and go to war by my against them, boyfriend. When we were settled, our therapy session started and it was intense from the beginning. When we got to talking about the real reasons that had landed me in her office I felt so "And exhausted: where exactly is here?" Mrs. Sibanda

"Here is now, where my past is making me push him away because of fear, pretending to be okay when I'm not and he can clearly see that I am not. Here is me getting angry at him for mistakes which are not his."

"So what term befits all these issues that you have bottled up inside of you?"

"Baggage, that's what it is."

"Let's unpack that baggage, shall we?"

"Okay".

One afternoon when I was five years old, I made my way to my friend's house to play. Whilst we were playing, the maid called her indoors as their gardener Mukoma was walking into the yard. He told me he

owed our maid, who sold super-cools, some money. He invited me to his quarters to get the money and I obliged. When we got inside he pulled me closer to him and held my arm with his right hand and he put his hand inside my skirt and moved my panties to the side. He inserted one finger inside of me. I started to squirm and cry he placed his mouth over mine and forced his tongue, which tasted like raw onions inside of my mouth. I was not aware of what was going on. but it did not feel right and the darkness of the room made it all worse. When he was done, he took out the hand he had inside of my panties and put it in his mouth. He told me to never utter a word of this to anyone or else he would hurt me more than he had just done and then cut off my tongue. He didn't even give me the money he supposedly owed.

I never told a soul.

Each year my parents would go for seminars in December so we would go visit my dad's side of the family and stay there until they finished and came to get us. This was usually just a few days before Christmas. One afternoon, one of my cousins who was way older than us called me into the house. He was already in high school and I was only in grade three. He made me lie on the bed and pulled down my shorts and panties and then he pulled down his own pants; we were in my aunt's bedroom. He started rubbing himself on me whilst his hand was fondling my recently emerging breasts. He then started trying to penetrate but the pain I felt made me scream out loud which startled him and led to him telling me to not make any noise and that he would only insert a small part of his penis inside of me. Even then, the pain was excruciating, when he had had his fill he started to masturbate whilst the tip of his penis kept on slightly brushing against my vagina. He reached his climax and when his sperm was released on me, he wiped me up and told me I could go play.

I wet the bed that night.

When morning came we made our way into town and met up with my other aunt and we went to the doctor. She made me lie down on a bed and spread my legs apart, she started probing and looking at me private area. When she was done, she told me to get dressed and then she invited both my aunts inside the consultation room. She told them that I was still a virgin but there were signs of assault and friction, which meant that the story was true. The rest of the things she said were too complex for me to understand at that age but I remember the mention of counselling, docket and trauma. My aunt thanked the doctor and then we left.

I went with my other aunt to her house, it was fun being there with my big cousin sister. On Saturday afternoon after we had finished having our lunch, we sat down in the kitchen and had a long talk. My aunt explained what had happened and what it meant and then she went on to explain what the doctor had said.

Faces of past devils began to flash before my eyes and it felt like I had six hands all over my body, all tearing at a part of not only my body but my soul too. I passed out. When I came to; he was still not done. He was grabbing onto my braids like his life depended on it whilst my life was being ruined by it. He groaned loudly and found his release, but he did not pull out, instead he put his weight on me and lay on top of me for a while. I had been violated in more ways than one, but that night, he broke me, not just physically but mentally too.

"I have tried to kill myself more than 22 times because of the injustices I have experienced at the hands of men and the society, but I am happy to be here in front of you today, sharing my story because that means I am still alive."

"Now repeat this after me and then we can start..."

My name is **Buhlebenkosi Siziba.** I am not a victim; I am a survivor!"

#### SILENT BORDER CROSSING

by Michelle Tigere

### "Where is my baby? Mwanawangu aripi? Where is my baby? Where is my baby"

Chipo asked frantically. Tiny little Mudiwa gone and she didn't know what to do. What would her husband say?

"Ndiani wamapa mwana wangu? Who did you give my child?"

Her eyes were full of tears as she yelled. The driver looked away and said to her,

"Sister mal. Everyone get back on the bus we have to go in 10mins"

"But my baby where is my baby?"

she yelled again but the bus drove away. Chipo grew up in Budiriro 3 in Harare. She didn't know that she was poor because everyone around her was poor. Of course there were "those neighbours" that had relatives with big big cars that would bring them relatives groceries all the time. She wondered why they didn't just take their family members to wherever it is that they got these big cars and endless bags of groceries. She asked her mother once and her mother told her

"Chipo unotaurisa."

She was often told that she talked too much, but if she had a question she had to ask. This is what made her the top student at Budiriri 3 Primary School and later on at Budiriro High school. Chipo was not only a good student but she was what the elderly aunties called a nice girl. They would often tell her mother

"endemunemwana akanaka."

This comment wasn't about her beauty but her character as she was agreeable, helpful and she attended church enough to make her mother proud.

Chipo met Tawanda when she was 17. She had passed all her 0-levels but her parents could not afford to pay for her to finish her A levels. She was informed by her mother that she would have to find something to do or get married soon. Her mother laughed as she said it but Chipo felt as though it was not a joke. She continued on studying with her friends that were still in school and helped them with their homework. One day while helping her friend Melody, her elder brother Tawanda who had just come back from South Africa greeted her: "Ndeipi Chipo ende wakuru."

She laughed, it was a silly comment he was only 3 years older than her but always joked that she was growing very fast. Needless to say many homework sessions later Chipo realized she had missed a period. Her first thoughts were not what the church members would say, nor what the aunties would say but it went right to her mother and the questions she would ask. How will you feed a baby? How will you buy diapers? What will you do for money? That Tawanda anevasika vakawanda muBudiriro muno - Tawanda has many girlfriends in this neighborhood. Her mother was wrong. Tawanda accepted his responsibility, they got married and everything was fine for a while but nothing is fine for long in Zimbabwe.

When Chipo lived under her parent's roof she never thought about money until she could no longer go to school. Nor did she think about it when she moved to her husband's house and shortly realized that when he went to South Africa he was a border jumper. Chipo had never been out of Harare except to go kumusha kwaRusape. She was not sure what he meant when he spoke of the difficulty of "crossing the border." Chipo often wondered if her husband was not being dramatic and overly playful as he often was, but in the back of her mind she could not pretend that when her husband was leaving or had just returned he always seems different. But Chipo was happy and put these worries to the back of her mind. A year into the marriage her husband told her they would save more money if they both lived in South Africa. He would try to find her a job which had proved impossible in Harare

and they could save money on the trips that he had to make every couple of months. Chipo was delighted as it wasn't often husbands wanted their wives to come to South Africa to join them. She had heard from the other aunties that "some" husbands had other families there. Now 19 she was delighted at her luck in finding a resourceful and loving husband. Who needed A levels when you could marry well and live a wonderful life? To get a passport for Mudiwa would have cost more than Tawanda had saved. Instead he told her that he had seen other women on the bus have their children taken across the border by other people. Chipo never having crossed the border had a many questions to ask but she trusted her husband and listened to his instructions carefully.

"You speak to the conductor and he will tell you what to do ok?"

The plan seemed simply enough. Tawanda would get her and Mudiwa at Park Station in Joburg and their new life would begin. On the day, she got Mudiwa ready and took a combi with her bag to Roadport bus station. When she arrived, she informed the conductor silently

"I have a passport, but she does not"

he nodded and told her it was fine. She wondered why Tawanda had been so worried. This seemed very simple. She may not have written her A levels but surely she had enough sense from her O levels to manage getting on a bus with her baby. The bus ride was long, they stopped, they ate and they used the toilet. She can't really remember. Mudiwa as always was the perfect little girl. She barely cried and the women on the bus commented "endemunemwana akanaka" she smiled.

When they got to the border, everything happened so fast. The conductor made a speech about what was happening but she was starting to get worried and all of a sudden he came and said

"Ndipe mwana wacho - give me the baby"

"What? Why?"

"Madam ital faster faster vamwe vatokumiriria - hurry up the others are waiting" he replied

"But where are you taking her? Will she not stay with us?"

The conductor was losing patience

"Kasi ifirst time ku crosa border?"

"Yes this is my first time coming to South Africa" she said softly with the shame of not knowing what was happening Remembering what Tawanda had said she hesitantly handed him Mudiwa who went without a fuss. When the bus started to move she started crying she didn't know why. Why did Tawanda not tell me that I would have to leave my baby? None of this made sense. Had she been tricked? She was all alone, the man next to her was fast asleep. One of the older ladies must have seen her distress and told her

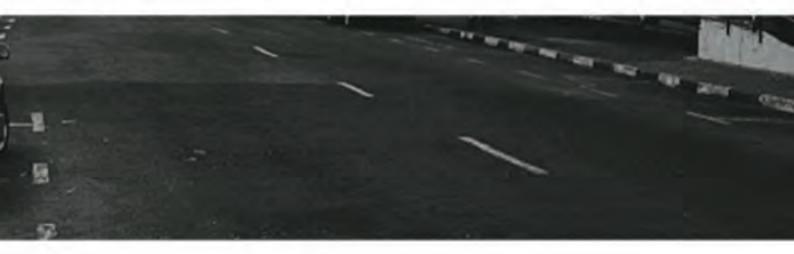
"Don't worry vanomupa kunevamwe vasina mapepa - they give her to others that don't have papers to cross"

They made it seem so normal: So ordinary that I should give my child to a stranger. I wondered and wanted to ask, as I usually did but I remembered Tawanda and my mother's words

"unotaurisa - you talk too much"

But now they were telling me they didn't know where my baby was. Everyone else was back on the bus but my baby was not.

The bus drove away.





# My BLACK is beautiful by Michelle Madzima



These portraits are part of a series I am currently working on titled My Black is Beautiful. The knowledge that your skin is what makes you unique, special and beautiful is what most women do not understand. We need to be more comfortable with our skin color, we need to constantly remind each other that Black is Beautiful. Black skin is powerful, Black skin is a work of Art!

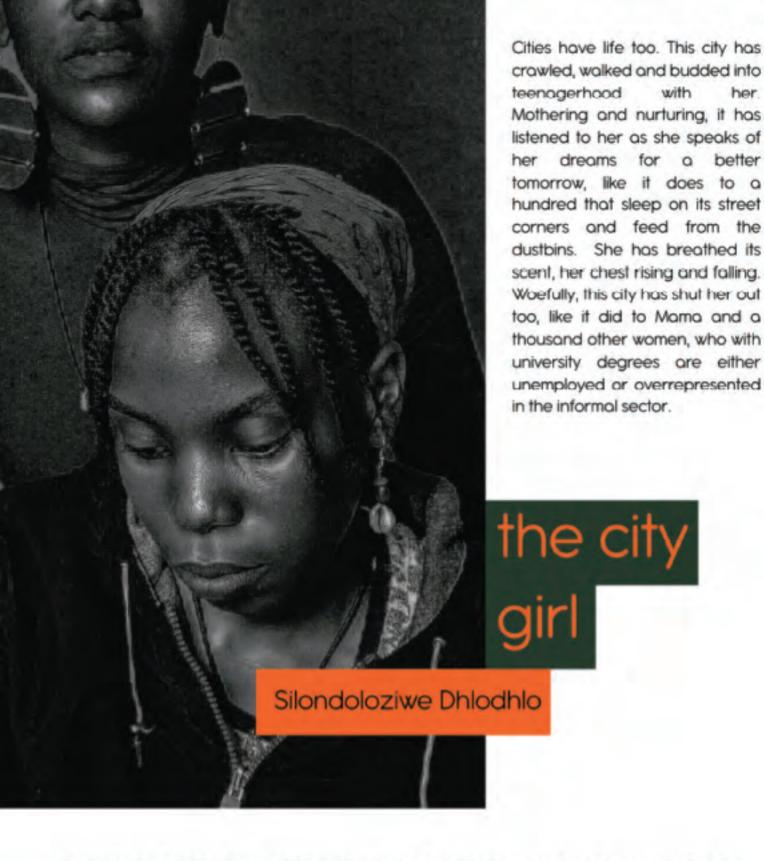
"For when I look in my mirror, my very soul cries out my black is beautiful."

#### Pachoto!

#### AROUND the



By the fireside'
Women gather 'pachoto'-'
on a daily basis as they
perform
their traditional gender role
of cooking
in the home. The fireside is a
place of



Deafening, her heart has been violently beating against her chest for the past one hour or more, that she has been hiding behind the Musasa tree. In actuality, it could have been langer than that, but since she possesses neither a watch nor a phone, her estimation is that she has waited long enough, for it to have been an hour and a half. Thrice, the ambulance with its blaring siren came in and went out. Pallid and sickly, an old man was wheeled in by two little children. Countless women with noticeable pregnancies have entered and exited.

Igneous, the September heat is sweltering, sweat starts to slid down the valley of her breasts. Should she...? No, she cannot be so careless, removing the jacket will expose her identity, after all it is the hood that is concealing her. Stoic, she endures the heat, lifting up her head from time to time to scan for any new faces that might have come into the clinic. Lowering it again, she feigns concentration on the beauty and fashion magazine that she has removed from her satchel. Disinterested by the magazine, her attention begins to drift and rests at a conversation that is three people away from her,

"You mean to tell me that your Suzanne got married last year, and you did not invite me? It seems like yesterday when we were celebrating her graduation!"

A high-pitched female voice exclaims. Judging from the maturity of her voice, she must be in her tittles.

"These things happen in a flash, that one does not get time to collect her scattered wits and remember who to invite. Mm these kids! She only told me about this young man a week before his people came to pay lobola. A month after the lobola proceedings, she was the epitome of elegance and sophistication in a pure white wedding dress! She was our own Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex!" The other woman speaks in gentle unhurried lones, her voice infused with pride and felicity.

"Suzanne should have known better than not to have invited mel Was I not the one who put in a good word for her to Mrs Dlamini, who in turn spoke to her brother, who convinced his Supervisor to plead with his uncle, who is the Project Officer at Plan International, so that Suzanne could be hired as a Human Resources intern?"

Her high-pitched voice has soared into a shrill.

"Mrs Dlamini didn't inform you that Suzanne left that job two months after she settled down?"

"Left the job? Could there have been a better offer than Plan International? Aren't they remunerated in foreign currency, while the rest of us are saddled with this hyperinflationary local currency?"

"She is now a housewife. Her husband would not have any of it. I tried talking to him, you know. How could I have sacrificed my personal happiness and became mired in debt so that she could learn in prestigious educational institutions, only to have her seated at home, with that degree certificate lying unused?" Her tone has assumed a heated and impassioned tempo.

"What is wrong with being a housewife? Did I not forsake my career for eight years to raise Thabo and Zenzo? Housewives are the ones who keep the social fabric of societies intact. They are the unsung heroes, the unpaid and unrecognised workers, who are nonetheless indispensable!"

"Not my daughter! She did not become a head-girl at Grade the President of the Debate Club and head-girl at High School or attain a Book Award at University so that she could become a housewife! Doormat housewife? And that boy has nothing but a Form the certificate! She got carried away by his cheap Japanese Honda Fit and ramshackle hardware shap..."

"Are you not supposed to be at school?"

Cutting through her relaxed mien, the words scare her to death. Her mind begins to work furiously even before she turns her eyes to meet the large and curious ones, looking down at her. Slightly above farty years, very tall and dark skinned, with a slim body that is swallowed by a rather drab and shapeless oversized dress, it's her neighbour MaMhlophe, a gossip connoisseur!

"Good afternoon Mama. Have you come for your monthly Blood Pressure Check-up?" Pasting a disarming angelic smile on her face and bearing pearly white teeth, that deepen her dimples, she replies. Should she pretend to be sick? No, MaMhlophe might give Mama a phone call, who would abandon her little tuckshop in a split of a second, to attend to her. Should she say that..?



#### TO THE MARKET BY DEBRA VAKIRA

The streets remember her footprints From days long gone They created memories with her As she trod them without restraint To the market she went

Now it is twilight And she navigates them with care Her aim is to get there Without awakening the soldiers

A basket balances on her head Its emptiness is heavy The streets pretend to be maimed Silently they encourage her To the market she goes

The soldiers smell a rat
And she smells their cat
Through Takawira she escapes
The road smiles at her face
And into the market she lands

Her basket is full
Tomatoes, potatoes, onions galore
Her customers await her return
She will sit by the street corner
Looking out for the police and soldiers who raid

With her humble earnings
She will feed her hungry children at home
The road burns her feet
As she escapes from the market to her home

From a distance she sees the late comers.
They are not so lucky
Vanambuya muri kuenda kupi?
Don't you know you're not supposed to be here?
Imbonogarai pasi apo
They are lucky they did not get a hiding
These are woes they face every time
With boldness and dignity
They will bear them

Corona yatiparira iyi mwanangu Vana vofe nenzara Dzokerai kwamabva Vanambuya They leave as if in compliance But knowing they cannot go back empty handed Tomorrow they will find another way They must feed their hungry children.

## Home no safe-haven: Lockdown with an abuser

"He hit me over and over again," says Anna in an interview with The Lead.
"I tried to run, but he tripped me. I fell on my face, tried to scream for help, but the only thing that came were more blows. I felt a familiar sharp pain on my right jaw. Lying helplessly on the ground being pounded like a punching bag, I reckoned I had to get up or he was going to kill me, I looked sideways and saw a brick a meter away. I gathered my strength and grabbed the brick. I hit him on the head with it and when he fell, I ran for my life. But he was not done, He came after me. But this time I was close to the road, such that when I screamed for help, some passers-by hurried over and rescued me from the relentless assault."

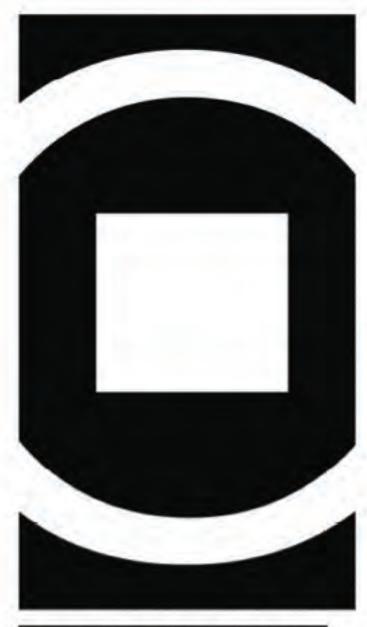
Lockdown enforcement exacerbated Anna's nightmare, being isolated alone with her oppressor. Lockdown laws - often ruthlessly and indiscriminately enforced by police and the national army - banning movement, meant Anna was not physically able to visit victim-friendly shelters for support.

Anna is not alone.

Her experiences are shared by many other women in homes across Africa. Like many of these women, Anna has been enduring abuse in silence throughout her nine years of marriage.

Her suffering from Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has only been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant number of African countries have adopted social lockdowns as a measure to slow the infection rate. Whilst effective in 'flattening the curve', the lockdowns have set lose abusers on their victims, with home proving to be one of the most unsafe places.





## Confinement and gender-based violence.

South Africa, the pandemic's epicentre in Sub-Saharan Africa recorded a 500 per cent spike in reports of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), from 12,000 to 80,000 cases in just one week. Highlighting how rampant domestic, sexual and gender based violence has become since the onset of the isolation and confinement policy.

In Kenya, a third of all the crimes reported since the first recorded COVID-19 case in Africa are related to sexual violence, Zimbabwe, with a

modest population of 14 million people, has recorded 1,757 distress calls: A 70 per cent increase, since the beginning of the lockdown, according to Musasa Project, a aender-based violence watchdoa. Anti-domestic violence service providers from Lesotho to Egypt have also reported increases in calls from women experiencing abuse and seeking assistance. Typically, according to data collected by the United Nations, 243 million women and airls between the ages of 15 and 49 worldwide are subjected to physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner each year. The State of African Women Report 2018 also paints a gloomy picture: "One study from Zambia indicated that, among the female sexual assault survivors, 49 per cent were younger than 14 and 85 per cent younger than 19. Violence makes an early appearance in women's intimate and sexual relationships. A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicates that over 50 per cent of ever-married airls have experienced IPV, with the highest rates in Equatorial Guinea, DRC, Gabon, Zimbabwe and Cameroon."

As seen in South African, Kenyan and Zimbabwean cases, these numbers are skyrocketing as the health, security and financial worries caused by the COVID-19 outbreak increases domestic tensions and forces families into lockdown in, statistically, the most dangerous place a women can be: her home.

Home isolation policies present abusers with increased opportunity to inflict harm on victims who are rendered more vulnerable by reduced access to their support networks and limited options for escape from home. Experts have characterized an invisible pandemic of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis as the "ticking time bomb" or a "perfect storm".

"COVID-19 lockdown effects differ in a sense that help is limited, affected households may suffer more quietly through psychological and economic violence. People are now idle; they have nothing to do. People do not have side initiatives that would keep them busy. The men and women sit at home and look at each other and any small disagreement ends in GBV," Amandla Ndlovu, a social worker in Zimbabwe, told The Lead.

A brief by UN Women noted an increase in GBV statistics, particularly violence against women since the outbreak of COVID-19 across the globe as security, health and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the frustration of home confinement.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), 35 per cent of women around the world have already experienced some form of sexual and GBV in their lifetime. In a crisis setting this number skyrockets to more than 70 percent.

#### Parallels with the Ebola experience

Similar increases in sexual and GBV were 2013-2015 Ebola observed during the outbreak in West Africa. In Guinea for example, some reports showed a 4.5 per cent increase in reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence as well as twice as many rapes.

The Down To Earth (DTE) organisation, notes that the parallels between the response to Ebola and COVID-19 are striking. "Public health infrastructure during Ebola came to a grinding halt," notes DTE. "In a desperate attempt to control the infectious virus, governments employed many of the current social distancing strategies including school closures, curfews and guarantines. As Ebola spread, governments were overwhelmed and the needs of women and children concerning sexual and gender-based violence were largely ignored in response and recovery planning."

More often than not, the violence only became evident after witnessing the devastating consequences for women and children. One such example. aftermath of Ebola, both Sierra Leone and Liberia recorded an upswing in teenage pregnancy rates.

#### A gendered perspective during COVID-19

"Everyone is being asked to stay home and be safe, but one thing everyone has

forgotten is that homes are not safe for women." writes Mwanahamisi Singano, a feminist activist in Uganda.

"Sadly governments are making huge assumptions that homes are safe. I have to disappoint them: homes are not safe for women; we know the facts." "To be clear. I am not suggesting that we abandon social distancing, Coming from Africa where social capital is all you have to manage a crisis like this, I do feel that as countries go into lockdown, we need to urgently provide needed support to millions of people who might now be experiencing harassment, abuse and violence in their home as they manage the spread of the virus."

WHO has emphasised that countries must incorporate a gendered perspective in their

response to the COVID-19 crisis.

As a result, Africa recently held its inaugural meeting of African Ministers for Gender and Women's Affairs hosted by UN Women and the African Union in partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with a special focus on how to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on women and girls.

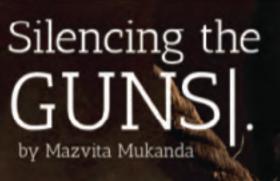
Held under the theme "COVID-19 Response and Recovery - a gendered framework", the meeting sought to address challenges facing women and girls in Africa due to the pandemic while informing response and recovery planning and financing to better address the differentiated impact of the pandemic on women and girls in the continent.

remarks to the delegates. Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the ECA. Vera Songwe expressed that as the continent begins to talk of exiting lockdowns that were imposed to curtail the spread of the virus, they must ensure that women and girls are protected. "Young girls are also out of school and become commodities for their families. We should also worry about early pregnancies among our girls," said Sonawe.

AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. Bineta Diop remarked that responses to COVID-19 in Africa must be gender responsive. "This is time for action," she told the meeting. The meeting called on governments across the world emphasizing the need to establish and inform communities on reporting processes, hotline numbers and support systems available to deal with a wide range of violence.

It remains to be seen if African governments will heed the call to make home a safe haven for women and girls.

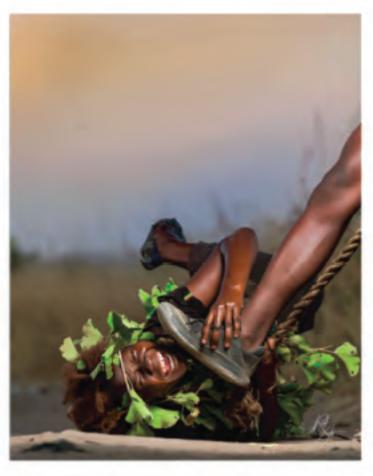












My piece is inspired by the female community. I got to understand that every woman is exactly like me, hence the majority of my pieces cover women. If the community understands that we are each other this means we can silence every gun through unity. My major aim is to raise awareness to every woman that we are one.





#### Extract from an unpublished novel - by Cynthia Chiedza Nyanyiwa

#### Chapter 1

I was destined to die the day my father passed on: to burn with him in the fires in which he perlshed. That Is the custom of my people; the glrls' lives are tied to the cords that tie their fathers to this world and if those cords no longer exist, the delicate flowers of the world will not survive. As I stand before the blaze; the licking, ever hungry, never satisfied tongue of fire; I am in a state of shock. I cannot cry and I cannot rejoice, I cannot move and I cannot remain still-I am a mind in a body that does not know its master; I am a master that does not know her mind.

The amber flickers rise from the fires, kissing the dark sky and dressing it with its beauty, up and up it follows the smoke to the heavens and as it goes so does my father: Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

I search my heart for sorrow.

I loved this man and need to feel the breaking and tearing of my heart to understand just how much I loved him, but there is nothing there but stillness-a stillness waiting to move but it does not know where to go. It is waiting for me; the master to say where but I do not know who I am after this-I had never planned anything beyond this.

I hear the crying and I understand the meaning: The whole village is here and all the neighboring villages and people from far away, with their white skins and their golden hair. I hear the singing and feel the vibrations of beating drums, but I am neither a singer nor a dancer because one needs a voice and a body for that and until now I was never sure I was allowed to have those.

My mother is silent; she is not allowed to cry. My uncles are there and they are singing too but I know it will not last because something has been done today, something that has never happened before and no one will dance and sing forever. I feel other eyes on me, watching and asking-

'Who are you, strange one?'

I look at the one who asks the question, and I answer him,

"I do not know who I am for I was never supposed to be."

I look away into the burning fires that refuse to burn out as if father is shouting orders to the forces and telling them that they should keep burning till I join him where he is. So we wait, the people sing and they dance until the ambers fill the heavens and the smoke takes over where the licking fires once danced: They are not hungry anymore. Tonight they will boast they have feasted on the king of the eagle people.

I let out a breath when the last fire burns out. I had not realized I was holding it in for so long a time. I look at the asking man once again and I have a new answer for him.

'I AM ALIVE'

#### Chapter 2

They say my father will live among us forever.

Just like his father and all our ancestors before that still live among us, there in the river Kano flowing ever so calmly until the end of days. I do not know how far true that is: I do not want it to be true. I cannot imagine them, watching us, immortalized forever in the most precious thing in the world.

Not in my river.

I hear the people hovering outside: they are all like bees in a hive. It looks almost chaotic, all the moving around but those on the inside of things know it is not. It is the preparation for the next one, the one after. The king is dead and someone else must live long.

I am my father's only child as he was his own's. My mother will live in the widow's home now, having to bear the double shame of having outlived her husband and only having one child, a daughter at that. A daughter who cannot inherit the throne.

They are still moving, the bees. Each forward movement they make ushering the end of my father's reign. Sometimes they stop by my room, whisper a few words and then they move on. They do not know what to do with me. I am an anomaly.

I do not know what to do with myself, I am an anomaly. So I sit still like waters in a well caged in, I cannot even hope to be a river I don't think I am allowed to. Someone stops by my room for a few more minutes than the rest, there is no murmuring and then he or she walks away. I am the only still thing in this moving orchestra. Will someone tell the conductor that I am an instrument too and that I too produce melody: That they should play me too.

They keep moving and moving until some of them move into my room. They undress me and I am told to bath in milk, in oil, in water that burns and in water that is freezing and my hair is pressed and it is braided and beaded and I am dressed. As all this is happening I am a spirit thing again, waiting for a body to control. After they are done morphing me into a thing I do not know, they leave and they go on again, the bees, swarming about.

All is silent and wait for the conductor. I watch as the colours dance before my eyes and as they splash the sky from yellow, to amber and amber mixes with a lavender and a shy blue and before long the lavender rebels and becomes a dark purple and then red moves out of the amber and the remaining amber turns into a darker shade. Now it's only the purple, red and darkest amber in the sky, magnificently beautiful it is a world of its own, but that world does not last. It descends and descends into the pits of the earth until there is only darkness: A darkness with its own peculiar beauty. Everything changes around me yet I remain a statue amidst the swarming bees, waiting to be moved.

And then in the silence something happens; the conductor remembers I exist, that I am an instrument too. They walk in slowly towards me, towards the strange thing. My mother is in front, looking the way she has always looked. Like the queen. Around her are the council members, her brothers and some elders of the commune. I stand there looking at them, wondering if they are real. They look down and then the conductor raises his hand and on queue they descend with the descent of my father's reign. On their knees they say with one voice,

'The king is dead. Long live the king!'

I am too shocked to react so I stand there frozen, yet ever so slowly I feel it, my forming body, my waking mind, the melody I can produce Outside the moon is awake, full, bright and defiant without a star in sight and I understand something else about myself;

"I AM A KING."

#### Chapter 3

They gather in thousands to witness the new sun, the dawn of a new era. They stand in awe and wonder and in silence they watch as I ascend the seat of my ancestors-the throne of all my grandfathers and in their eyes I see the question,

'what is this thing that stands before us?'

I look back at them and answer,

I am the one who lived and I am king."

It is all I know about myself at the moment, the rest time will reveal. There is no swarming of bees, there is no singing nor is there any dancing; there is only the wind, silent yet felt everywhere it passes, all over like the questions that have started today, questions that will never seize to be asked. I see people I have only dreamt of, the people who have made me bow my head in self-doubt. Slowly but with deathly finality the ceremony goes on, words are spoken and vows are made. Words come out of my mouth: Words I cannot recall for my life.

The words of a girl in dreamland.

The words of a girl who has no form or substance.

The words of the girl called KING.

I see her from the outside, her eyes void and lifelessly waiting for the moment she wakes and the dreams give way to reality, but each moment that passes solidifies this other twisted reality-the oddity. And as I look from her to the crowd I see it too in the eyes of the multitude; they too are waiting for the waking gong. Yet as it does not come, each passing second carries them closer and closer to the oddity until they are wedded to this new reality. They think that if they only play along they will awake and it is only after they have bent the knee and pledged allegiance that they realize what they have done, the lines they have crossed. They look at her and she looks at them and together they understand: they have flown blindly into delirium and they must face the music of madness until the mania washes away on its own and all return to the previous roles. For now, they must go along with the mania. And before I know it I am back in my body and I am descending the stairs in a dream like state and there is a force and a power around me that compels all people to bow and lower their heads when I am near. There are new rules now that come with my existence and everyone follows them. My mother, my kin, the foreigners -all of them follow the rules of mania waiting for the cure. And as I glide past the parting crowd I understand other things about myself:

I AM POWER AND I AM AN ILLUSION.

#### Chapter 4

It is about half an hour after my coronation. The word sounds alien to me, like random letters thrown together that mean nothing at all. I know the literal meaning of the word-it is the act of crowning a sovereign-but words are not just literal things. They carry with them symbolic meanings as well: They carry with them oughts and ought-nots. They call me king but I am not a king because I am a woman, well almost anyway. They dress me in a long embroidered robe and adorn me with layers and layers of expensive beads and crown my head with an imposing crown, they put words before my name-they say The Ruler of the Eagle kingdom, Protector of the Ruwazi people, Commander of the army, High Priest, His Royal Highness King Amandla.

They stand before me afterwards, all of them like vultures waiting for my dying flesh, for they know like I know, my name might mean power but

I am an illusion.

It is only after my mother asks to have a moment with me that they all leave, but I know they are not far off, they never are. They are like the branches of a tree; the wind may sway them this way or that way but forever they are tethered to the tree. Even though it is only my mother and I left in the room, it feels more crowded somehow. There is a heaviness to her solitary presence that I have never gotten accustomed to.

My mother is a beautiful woman; she has always been. She is tall, dark with the sharpest eyes, she has always kept her hair short and that makes her beauty stand out in all its striking wonder. If you look closely you'll see that beneath the royal robes and glamour there is a warrior there. I know by the way she looks at me that she is about to tell me a tale along the lines, the story of dying in order to do the greater good.

She is trying very hard to keep herself together, but I can feel her crumbling and if she cries now, the tears will be for her husband and her daughter: She who was not allowed to mourn her husband.

'Your father insisted on overturning the law', somehow she reigns the tears in, the sea of emotion straining behind the thin layer of ice she protects herself behind, 'he insisted and I am glad for it kept you safe. Now my child, you must do as we all do: You must sacrifice yourself. Today the girl must die and the king must be born. We must all wear masks and this unfortunately or fortunately must be your own.'

These are revised words I can tell, words she has gone over time and time again throughout father's illness. My eyes say to her I am not a king; I am a girl. She shakes her head and says, 'the only way your father got the elders to agree was by insisting that he had had a dream and in that dream his ancestors told him that you would be the first of the women to rule her people and that you will be king because the spirit of the great king Amandla would live in you and he would rule through you.

'You know that they would never agree to being ruled by a female, let alone a girl of 16. You are alive and that's all that matters-keep yourself and me alive too. There is nothing to ruling. Just do as the elders tell you; fight their wars and honor their customs; be their king. And just keep the nation's leaders happy and support their causes. I know you saw the representative of the new government right? You must do as your father did; know what people want and give it to them. It shouldn't be so hard, my Queen.'

She smiles slightly as she says the last word and for the first time since father died I smile and nod, 'I'll wear the mask mother, I'll protect us.'

She nods and with that, she goes out and as I sit in the silent night, I feel something stirring inside me.

It is my heart that has always been there somewhere, always without being allowed to beat. It is then that I realize something else about myself.

I AM AWAKE





Author Biography Dr Getrude Gwenzi is a Zimbabwean early career researcher, writer and higher education consultant at Global South Research and Policy Group. She is passionate about child welfare, orphans and vulnerable children as well as higher education. She has published academic articles in international journals namely Child Care in Practice (Taylor & Francis) and Emerging Adulthood (Sage), where she has examined the lives of children without parental care and care leavers in Zimbabwe, and the meaning of family. She also writes a personal blog and has written a few articles on social protection in Zimbabwe. Getrude currently lives in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Excerpt from the manuscript titled

Reinventing Womanhood: The African Woman's Untold Story

"I am passionate about telling the African woman story. A happy story crafted in her context. I want to capture her smile and journey. I tell everyone I am tired of seeing an Africa represented by children and mothers with flies on their faces. Our essence has to be put out without limiting us to mere project beneficiaries. I want to do justice to the real African woman through cultural positivity whilst capturing her beauty 'a noteworthy phenomenon' - photos by Diana Motsi

Being a woman in a predominantly patriarchal society is challenging for most women in sub-Saharan Africa. Defining who we are under the control and conditioning we receive from our childhood and traditions is particularly difficult for the average young woman. Stepping out from that systemic, deeply entrenched male domination becomes a form of resistance. The young women who have dared to redefine their existence based on who they are outside of the male influence are often looked upon with disdain. This book asks several questions of the modern African woman, some of which are:

How do we define success in a woman's world? What makes the difference between the woman who makes it and the one who does not?

How do women who identify themselves as successful shape their identity?

What forces have come together in reinventing your womanhood?

What challenges have they faced in their lives and in their journey to become the women that they are today?

How do women find their value in a performance driven society, particularly one that also says their place is in the home?

How do we define success in a woman's world? What makes the difference between the woman who makes it and the one who does not? How do women who identify themselves as successful shape their identity? What forces have come together in reinventing your womanhood? What challenges have they faced in their lives and in their journey to become the women that they are today? How do women find their value in a performance driven society, particularly one that also says their place is in the home?

I begin with my own story as a PhD holder from Zimbabwe. I am currently unmarried and question whether marriage is necessary for my happiness. I remember growing up in a home in which the man of the house was not responsible for taking care of me and my siblings or being the breadwinner. My mother. Kesina, was often left to pick up the pieces every month when her husband disappeared with his monthly salary. When I was fifteen my parents separated and it was as if nothing changed in the house financially because my mother had always been the one caring for us. I was a young girl with a dream to be highly educated and I was determined to succeed against all odds. Raised in the dusty farming town of Mvurwi, in Mashonaland Central province of Zimbabwe. I had few opportunities available to me. Somehow, or it was by the grace of God, I managed to go through from primary school to Advanced Level and I remember periods where food was scarce at home.

Every woman has a story about how she got to the place where she is now. As women, our stories are closely intertwined with those of our families, significant others and our society. As the saving goes, women are the fabric of the society and as such, an African woman's tale is interwoven and constructed through her interactions with the individuals around her. We seldom see a woman being celebrated in her own right, through the telling of her own personal growth story in the African context. She is either depicted as the successful working mother, the wife or partner to someone famous or if she is unmarried, her story is often marred with the undertone of chastisement of her singleness. More recently, we have seen the rise of a new crop of empowered women who are taking up meaningful positions in their societies, women who are not only taking their seat at the table, but are crafting their own tables from scratch through entrepreneurship ventures. We simply do not see enough of these women's stories. Yes, we read about the rising celebrity woman or the successful well-known female in our town, but where is the story about the "everyday", "ordinary" African woman pushing boundaries in her community and home?



My story also intersects with my mother's own story of strength and grit as she stood to make sure that her children would live a better life than she did. I remember she always used to tell us "the only inheritance I can give you is education, so please take your schooling seriously." One day I was sitting in my mother's four roomed house as a 15-year-old girl, dreaming about how great I was going to be. I visualised the dream before it was a reality and therefore planted a seed that propelled me further over the years. My dream was to fulfil my mother's wishes and get an education. I promised that I would work harder than anyone else in the room and that one day I would make a name for myself. Today, I have been a recipient of three prestigious full scholarships, including two international fellowships which saw me living and studying in Ireland and Hong Kong for my Masters' and PhD respectively. I am now working as a higher education consultant for my own research network that I co-founded with a friend. Together, we support prospective postgraduate students to find opportunities for higher learning. Our mentoring project identifies disadvantaged youths with a passion for learning and supports them to find opportunities that would otherwise not be available for them. The following is an excerpt from my interview:

How do you define success?

Success to me is keeping on even when the odds are against you. In life there will be many challenges, but the idea is forge ahead anyway. I do not give up, no matter what. As long as I still have breath in me, I will not give up.

## What makes the difference between the woman who makes it and the one who does not?

The concept of "making it" is a myth. I believe that there is no limit to what one can do, especially if they are committed to making something of their lives. Nowadays, I see a lot of young people thinking that as long as they have a certain number of followers on social media, they have "arrived". This is a misconception. I think what you are referring to is an individual's perception of success as compared to someone who may view themselves as less successful. I think it is all relative. My idea of success will differ from the next person. But I think that what makes the difference is drive. You can have all the ideas in the world, but if you do not have the drive to act them out, they are just dreams.

Would you describe yourself as successful? If yes, how does that success shape your identity?

I would describe myself as successful in some aspects of my life more than others. No one can be successful in everything. I have been successful in my academic career definitely, having successfully completed my PhD in my early thirties. This success has impacted my identity a lot, mostly how people view me. I find myself worrying about that. There are these stereotypes that are attached with highly educated females, especially when they are single, like me. People assume that I am intimidating and this has been verbally stated to me by a cishet male. Often the word "too" accompanies people's descriptions of me, "too much", "too exposed", "too educated", which seem to carry negative connotations. I have found myself hiding the fact that I have a PhD when I am going on first dates with guys. I just don't want them to define me based on that alone. So, my success has definitely shaped my identity and how I interact with others. It is sad that it seems like I have to tone myself down to suit other people, which I really shouldn't have to do. W



W hat forces have come together in reinvent your womanhood?

From my background story above, it is clear that education shaped the woman that I have become. I am still in the process of becoming and currently, my social environment largely influences how I live my life and the decisions that I make as a woman. Take for instance my choice to be a single woman at 34. Yes, it is a choice because I could have picked any Tawanda, Dennis and Henry who have come my way. But I am a woman with standards. My choice in partner is no longer dictated by societal pressure to get married because I am way past the age where one is expected to have settled down and gotten married. Because I am an independent woman, I can choose who I want to spend the rest of my life with and this is not dependent on what he can do for me. Back in the day, perhaps, some of our parents may have gotten married out of necessity, I do not have that kind of pressure. I have the power to make informed decisions about sex and family planning due to my education, which is something women who are less educated may not have had in the past. The chances of an unwanted pregnancy that might lead to a forced marriage are next to nil. These are just some of the forces that shape my womanhood. I am a woman who can make decisions for her life with minimal external pressure. Of course, nowadays, the pressure that most millennials have is social media, and that is a completely different social force impacting most women. The desire to fit in with the crowd or speed things up with an unworthy partner just to be able to post pictures on Instagram with the hashtag #BlackLove or #ISaidYes is like a drug. I cannot say that I am immune to those pressures, but I do watch what I feed my mind and choose who I follow on these platforms.

What challenges have you faced in your life and in your journey to becoming the woman that you are today?

Part of my background story has covered this. I was able to rise above abject poverty to being financially independent because of my education. Poverty is a real challenge

to most women, because without resources one can only go so far in life. Our society respects people who are financially capable, unfortunately. The poor girl child is invisible, often violated and unheard. Her story is seldom listened to. I have also faced gender and racial discrimination while I was pursuing my studies, particularly as an African woman in Asia. I had to work twice as hard to prove myself and have my voice heard, while my male, white counterparts got it easier. Not once, I faced racial microagression when I received advice to focus on returning to my home country and not trying to live in Europe or Asia. This was another way of telling me that I do not fit in. In a way, I am happy I returned to the continent of my birth to make a difference for my own people, but I often wonder how much of that was because the doors would not open for me where I was. I would like to think that I have excelled despite these odds and now I create my own platforms without waiting for someone to rescue me. I believe ultimately that no one can save me but myself, so I do what I can every single day. . .









It is a hot afternoon in Mashonaland Central Mbire District, I am doing a series of interviews with teen mothers. They are comfortable telling us about their experience with sexual abuse and gender-based violence. As I am doing the interviews I realize in each and every story these young women are sharing there is a powerful VOICE of moving on. Their aspirations are so vivid and their dreams remain despite their horrible experiences. I decide I want to capture this ...... The woman who was once battered and bruised but is holding on and persuing her future, A woman who has a VOICE and is using it".







MY BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL





"Izwi rangu Izwi rako mazwi edu ..." amashiwi yesu

> Zambia «

oohhhh, ooohh Nyimbo zako talililala oohh .

I am a dreamer, nakulila mufilamba nsoni. i am a silent voice in a crowd breaking thru and speaking out.

here goes ganti pali shintu chubabisha ni mawo yo nishinfya ukuti si nagazishigilezhe gant pali shintu chubabisha ni mawo yo ni shinfya nukanlila kuzewushya yimba nyimbo zako ba kuvwe wu labila wusakanle na mwezo mutima wako ziyimbese nyimbo zako.

yimba nyimbo zako bakunvwee wu labila usankale na wyezo mutima wako ziyimbeshe nyimbo zako .

> exerpt of the song Nyimbo Zako by Wezi



### BEFORE THEY BROKE YOUR HEART

Embroidered beads hugging your waist representing African beauty you where the woman of your prime.

When you walked the streets men coughed out in their meriment of how they would kill to make you their wife. My dear Nandi Note that such liberal terms from the men would be your downfall.

Because love does not dig up cemeteries on its way to the alter.

So you defined lust as love ,you would soon discover the reality of love in these African cattle kraals means cleaning dung in the process .

The men sang you praises as you walked to the river every morning they worshipped the very sand on your feet. If these men could draw they would have painted you the Mona Lisa of our time, oh how they undressed you with their eyes, how they fantasized about your thighs, how they claimed ownership of you while you where still a child.

Telling your father they would rewards him cattle if he betrothed you to kings.

The sun watched your beauty every morning, you where the hope of the east, mwana waku Maya the very reason the sun rises, your beauty made the blood of chieves boil as they longed to lay your down on the banana leaves.

Salty and dusty this path tells tales of women that came before you, they where as beautiful as the colors of the rainbow, but they where loved only because they could walk like snakes and posses men.

like an hour glass eating time from those that beg for it. See you are only needed to satisfy the adrenaline rush that makes them sweat white and when they are done they see no purpose in pursuing what they have acquired.

So they watch you walk to the river in the morning, but this time they don't sing your praises they don't see your beauty and the sun frowns on your shriveled beauty.

See we grew up believing that In our culture covering our woman's bodies is protection and morality but we have also raised hungry men that wish to explore why we have covered their women

A crazed generation of people with wrong choices and broken hearts.

So before you could open your eyes Nandi ,your pride was sold for approval and acceptance.

Now the only property you own is a penumbra of how great you where before they broke your heart.

By Mary Chiselembwe

# BROWNSAINT.



## Mulenga Mulenga

Mulenga Jestina Mulenga lives and works in Lusaka. She is freelance visual artist aged 33 and holds a diploma in Art and Design. Last year she was awarded the most outstanding Female Visual Award in Zambia during the National Ngoma Awards Recent exhibitions include ceremony. Sanna Festival Exhibition, Kerry Packer Gallery, Australia; African Creatives, Calabar Gallery, United States of America (all in 2020); National Ngoma Awards Exhibition, Henry Tayali Gallery, Zambia (2019); Tupelo International Artists Workshop Exhibiton, Capetown; Dak'Art Biennale, Gallery of Things. Senegal: Zambia: Contemporary art in the Making, the African Studies Gallery, Israel (all 2018); Biennale of Contemporary Art Seychelles; Seychelles National Museum; African Voices, National Gallery, Zimbabwe; Africa Creative Ensemble Festival, Limpopo, South Africa: and Kuboneshagu Women's National Exhibition, Lusaka National Museum (all 2017). She is a 2015 Asiko International School Alumni under CCA Lagos and attended the summer school at International Summer Academy of fine Arts in Salzburg, Austria in 2016.

Mulenga Jestina Mulenga's work considers current and historical representations of female black bodies within the context of post-colonial Zambia, specifically the ways in which deeply rooted social roles and identities are reproduced and reinforced throughout every stage of life. Mulenga works across painting, sculpture, photography, installation and performance, to revisit and reimagine old and new narratives that connect themes of gender and socio-cultural discourses within the legacy of colonialism.



#### BY NALUMINO LIKWASI

The inspiration behind my submission was the increasing need to have African queer narratives being included in the african feminist movement. Queer identities are seen as un-african and it is up to us to change that narrative. Queer people exist in the african set up and as opposed to erasing and criminalizing these identities, we need to bring visibility to diversity and inclusion. In the spirit of Ubuntu that speaks to "I am because we are", our struggles are not very different and we need to unify our voices to create the change we need in Africa.

#### Knew.

From a tender age, I always felt different, not quite like the other "girls".

I was around 14 or 15 years old when I heard it first, in hushed voices as the two elderly women walked behind me. "Is that a girl or a boy?" I smiled and walked on hoping this question would haunt the rest of their day.

At the time, I was getting more confident in expressing my gender how I felt it best represented me. My style was becoming increasingly masculine and with a very slender frame and an almost flat chest, I can understand the confusion. What most likely caused the uncertainty in others, I believe, was that I am well blessed in the back!

Gender in the Zambian set up is extremely narrow, focusing only on what is between ones' legs at the time of birth; this sets you up for life with set expectations and roles. Little thought is given to the complexity of gender with regards identity, and/or expression.

Over 10 years from that encounter, I believe people are more open minded to diversity. I too have evolved and am more embracing and open with my own choices in how I identify and present. Not too long ago, I belonged to the "feminists are bitter and man hating" crew; I believed masculinity was strength and so the hierarchy must be that way too. It took a lot of unlearning and relearning to understand the concept of feminism and its importance, more so in the kind of world we live in now.

My presentation is androgynous and as for my gender identity, the jury is still out on that (they have been out for a long time). How then does society perceive a person like myself and how do they reconcile this with what they have always known to be the truth - that gender is binary and linear? Our socio-political environment has not made it conducive for people to freely express themselves and information regarding identity vis a vis gender is very narrow in our context. This has popularized the use of derogatory terms to describe persons of gender diverse identities and presentation, making them face multi-layered marginalization.

All humans are born equal in dignity and rights; this is enshrined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This however, is becoming less and less true in our society with increasing levels of violence and hate against all groups seen to not conform to perceived norms; this is particularly true for gender and sexual minorities. Often used as tools for political mileage, governments and religious groups spearhead hate speech and are responsible for inciting violence while in higher circles preaching inclusion and equality. We must hold our governments to higher standards as citizens, and grassroots must be empowered to understand the mechanisms in place for such to be a reality. Government commitments must in action ensure inclusion and non-discrimination become

Government commitments must in action ensure inclusion and non-discrimination become the norm for everyone in Zambia.

## IS THAT A GIRL OR A BOY?











## Rose WHO rese

#### by Angela Ngulube

Her life was a song of wonder and marvel despite her many fails,

One of Marvels under covered heroes, the famous sidekick who
failed to stay in the dark, code name Rose. My mother!

A beauty as captivating as the sunset on the shores on the Zambezi
River. A gentle soul with a fierce attitude like the waves on the mighty
Victoria. Shy, shaky smoke that blew out into flames despite her
many falls. Yes even in hard times she rose!

Oh what a spirit she had that Rose!

Her strength needed by all yet expected t
o complain not at all. It was her duty after all! So she lifted her head,
not to high but just enough to hind to the call on her strength. Her neck
always ready to turn, bend and to lift him and his team as requested!
Never to contest. Silence the expected virtue from her, Woman!
Her needs because of her gender never really part of society's Men
agenda. Restricted only to house chores, baby wars and showing
up by his side at shows so he can look good in the eyes
of his many friends "Joes!"

Oh but still she rose that rose! After living in the dark,
because of her many thorns which they feared would shape
into horns! One day bold and Majestic she sneaked into the light
and tadah! There it was a feeling of total worth! A black queen for
the first time understood she too could be king a title! Rose, rose
to show anyone can enter a castle and live as king!

Woman get education, get keys!





Is it okay to leave her alone? Just let her bel

Let the girl child grow Let her grow freely like wild grass Let her explore for herself and discover for herself Let her not be expected to grow like roses when she is wilder than the desert sand

Let her grow in a friendly environment, Free from religious and societal judgment They will bind her and imprison her mind Do we want that?



Let her fulfill all the stages of childhood
Without the expectations of a grown woman
Without the fear of dangerous men
Roaming the streets trying to eat her up
Without the feeling that she cannot trust the men in her life
Because the devil does not wear Prada anymore
He lives in the bodies of some of whom she holds dear
How can she tell friend from foe?

Let us leave the girl child to explore all the opportunities she sees fit.

She will pilot the plane if that is what her soul craves.

Leave her to explore her talents and her gifts.

She is not to be stopped neither is she to be anchored.

Who do you think you are depriving her of the education she has a right to?

Protect her do not harm her
Empower her in the same way you empower him
Allow her to speak her mind the same way you allow him
Give her the opportunity to make big decisions
She must know that feeting
Therefore, she can choose her path accordingly
Let the girl child discover what beauty means for her
Let her grow into herself and not your version of beauty
After all, who are you?
Who gave you this big authority you are using to
set beauty standards?

Let the girl child not feel the pressure to look oil free on a sunny day! It is nonsense if you ask me.
Let the girl child be! I am no longer asking.

She will live the life she sees fit!

She will grow into a cactus if she so pleases.

Let Her Be!





# Alice Mula

Alice Mulombe Muyambo is a self-taught visual artist from Zambia with 3 years of experience. She has had 13 group exhibitions, with 3 in foreign countries; Egypt, South Africa, and Australia and I solo exhibition. She won an award at the 2019 Oscar of African Creativity in Egypt and was nominated for a National Award in Zambia at the 2019 Ngoma Awards for the most outstanding female visual artist. Her genre of art is abstract and conceptual as she explores relationships between reality and her view of life and the elements that create different forms in nature. Her work expresses a chain of emotions that go beyond what the eye sees. She creates for the mind and the soul as she gives the viewer a moment to delve into their thoughts. Her artistic expressions involve photographic images which she choreographs and mixed media presentations. Also, she speaks on issues such as mental health and is currently having a virtual art exhibition via

www.iamwithoutaface.org. She uses art to raise awareness of issues that are apparent in her community and around the world.

This particular body of work was inspired by the impact a woman or a female figure has had in the history of African traditions. These figures were called goddesses and queens and had the power over the people that believed in them. The work identifies the significance of the role of women in history and the modern world. It highlights that time may have changed, certain beliefs may have been forgotten but the power of women has been transferred from generation to generation and will still be significant for generations to come. Women are protectors of the heritage, their presence is synonymous with holding power and being change-makers.



Her place was in a four walled room called kitchen Broken dishes were the order of the day

She had mastered the scents of the various nail breaking dish washing liquids she struggled with every time she tried to scrub the dirt away In this kitchen. She was brought down to the level of a dishwasher Her competition being dishwashing liquids sponges.

Water levels and sometimes she had to unblock mini drainages In this kitchen she was just a chef

Master of recipes Knowledgeable spice expert Doctor of greasy areas Floor scrubber

It was a full-time job she could barely stay sober Her opinions landed on kitchen counters Her musical performances on pots and pans

Her creativity lowered to only determining the amount of salt and spices Because in this kitchen her position was belittled

Value depreciated Underestimated, frustrated, under rated, future denigrated
Whoever gave her the deeds

To this place needs

To wake up to reality and realize that this was not her place Somebody needed to see to it that this issue was addressed Although a shallow mind went ahead and named the kitchen her place

With pleasure she struggled to maintain sanity in the place since she valued her priceless contribution

They could not see beyond the chores

Cause this place meant magical happy meals to not only satiate hunger but to raise even a generation

You see her intention were miscalculated Her abilities even worse no-one put her into consideration Still they They thought she belonged not in a boardroom

Her specialty was cookery who said documentation lived in the same room?
You see her place was not at home battling crumps
Nursing period flows and wiping blood off floors
Her place was not a home practicing selective hearing
Or being the

Chief In administering first aid, passing a ban

This one they handed to her and called him husband

Her place was not to seduce or in any way arouse or satisfy the sexual appetite of another human to stay enslaved and answer morning glory calls or stand accused of the outcomes or reactions of the penis

Her place was not in a fellowship of women who taught her traditional scripture Behaviorism or home management systems which were never approved in universities because they were just common myths and beliefs

Her place was not as a sex symbol, bed warmer, stress reliever or a horny man's entertainer

Her body was not as a museum of attractive statues for show

heart So yes, sometimes she fought the wrong battles
Fought to keep her presence subtle
So, they pretended not to understand
It was the best they could do as they could not understand
Her power, her finesse, her authority or her grace
Her ability to keep calm when it was raining rocks
ability to think through and foresee situations which was no joke He

Her ability to think through and foresee situations which was no joke Her ability to multitask, handle

Child birth and come back fast

They feared bringing her into the boardroom as they couldn't understand someone who could overthink

Someone who could battle a ship right at the verge of a sink And her biggest mistake was to fight for equality It defined stupidity

As women had already attained an unbeatable level of a superiority Her place? her place was on pedestal, a million feet up on a throne of stone

So, without feeling like an object pardon her as she gracefully reigns in an era where women aren't tools but are people too

She is just unstoppable, stands unbeatable, she is queen, and her place, her place is on top.

"Sunga mukukoshi ubulungu tabwashupa . . . "

