

BUILDING WITH A WOMAN

Book Reviews
Q&A with Authors

A portrait of Maletjema Mathiba, a Black woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing glasses and a bright pink ruffled top. She is smiling and has her hands clasped in front of her. The background is a solid light brown color.

MALETJEMA
MATHIBA

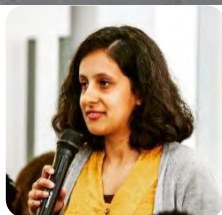
BOOK REVIEWER | MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER | FITNESS ENTHUSIAST

EW BLOG: Book Reviews and Q&A with Authors

COLLECTION OF BLOG POSTS

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Editor's Note

The month of August has been a very gruesome one for many South Africans. The scourge of gender-based violence and femicide continues to dominate news headlines daily. Women and young children are sexually assaulted and then murdered by the men, who mostly are their relatives, husbands, and boyfriends. August was also a month where we remember those that have lost their lives due to this pandemic. It has been a year since Uyinene Mrwetyana was murdered and our hearts are still hurting from her death. While one thought it will end, the police once again go on to kill young Nathaniel Julies in the community of Eldorado Park. We call all men to end this war against women and children. This generational war should end with us, not be intensified by us. Women give birth to humanity, and we should celebrate them all the time.

As we start the new month of September, EW Blog dedicates our latest eMag, the summer edition, to all women across the globe, but most importantly to our new EW Blog partner, Maletjema Mathiba. Maletjema, an accountant, avid book reader, book reviewer, motivational speaker, fitness enthusiast and all-round businesswoman has decided to partner with EW Blog. In this partnership, we will share our content on different platforms, celebrate each other success and help build each other's brands. The theme for this edition is titled 'Building With a Woman' in celebration of this partnership with the iron lady. In this edition, we have book reviews ranging from different categories such as business, politics, nature, crime, and agriculture. There are also exclusive interviews with leading and powerful female authors such as Lerato Mogoathle, NR Brodie, Jackie Phamotse, Fiona Snyckers, Busisekile Khumalo and many other more. This is an edition where we celebrate women power and their indelible mark in the different spheres of our lives. Enjoy our edition and remember to always buy local books.

Thank you,

Yours truly,

Ezekiel Kekana

EW Blog, Chief Editor





Al Venter and his wife Trille Harris, also Gabriella, at Venter's John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts.

Al Venter has covered many wars in a career that spans half a century. In the process he has written so-something books, had many 'close encounters', been wounded twice but in retrospect, reckons he would not have wanted it any other way.

Al's books cover, amongst others, the war against al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab in Somalia, historical wars like Biafra, El Salvador, the Lebanese civil war and others, but most notably how both South Africa and Portugal fought their guerrilla struggles in Africa. He is a specialist in weapons of mass destruction: his latest title in this field is Nuclear Terror, to be followed by a book in conjunction with an internationally renowned Israeli scientist on chemical and biological warfare. Al Venter has published nine titles on the realm of the underwater, including free-diving with sharks and uncovering shipwrecks and their treasures.



COMBAT

SOUTH AFRICA AT WAR ALONG THE ANGOLAN FRONTIER

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COMBAT

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Who I am?

I am a curious individual and I love to learn hence I read so many books. If you do not find me reading, I would probably be studying, keeping fit and healthy or with my family and friends. I love to challenge myself and learn about different topics and subjects, especially those relates to personal development. This is because I started reading at a very young age. Those books and stories were not just fascinating, but they built me to become the woman I am today who is smart, bold, curious and fun.

Why had I decided to join?

I decided to join EW Blog because we share the same passion, goal and vision which is to get people to read more. Reading is a mine of gold which can assist anyone to become anything. It is one of the best tools to open one up to the world and break boundaries we have had over the years. The Blog also has a good team with diverse skills and talent. They carry the same values and working with them has been like working with a family.

Achievement in the long run.

I want to see African literature growing and improving in terms of quality, content and to reach the whole world. I want young people to read more so they know more and can achieve more. I see myself growing with other people in this **space and making an impact in people's lives. I will be** reaching more people through my YouTube channel and other platforms.

Advice to women.

Arm yourself with knowledge and be fearless. Reach for your goals and ambitions. Surround yourself with people who are loving, supportive and people who challenge you to be the best version of yourself. Love yourself, take care of your mind, body, money, and spirit. Also have fun, someone once **said "work without play made John a dull boy"**.

Gender-based violence and rape.

This is a tragedy that is upon us as women. As we fight and wait for the law to change, let us fight against this violence, teach young children what this is and that they should be open to talk about anything that happens to them. To further reprimand men against such violence and not to protect **anyone in the name of keeping the family's dignity, enough** is enough! GBV is a criminal act. The government must have strict measures and place to protect all women and children against this pandemic.

By Maletjema Mathiba

I want to see African literature growing and improving in terms of quality, content and to reach the whole world

Maletjema Mathiba

Searching for Simphiwe: Riveting Stories that Exposes the Complexities of Contemporary South Africa

One of the biggest pleas from South Africans in the literary scene is the need for local authors to tell local stories. Stories that encapsulate and reflect our daily life experiences.

It truly warms my heart that the message seems to be finding expression in the hearts of many South African writers.

Sifiso Mzobe's latest book titled Searching for Simphiwe elegantly affirms the point that our local authors are heeding our calls.

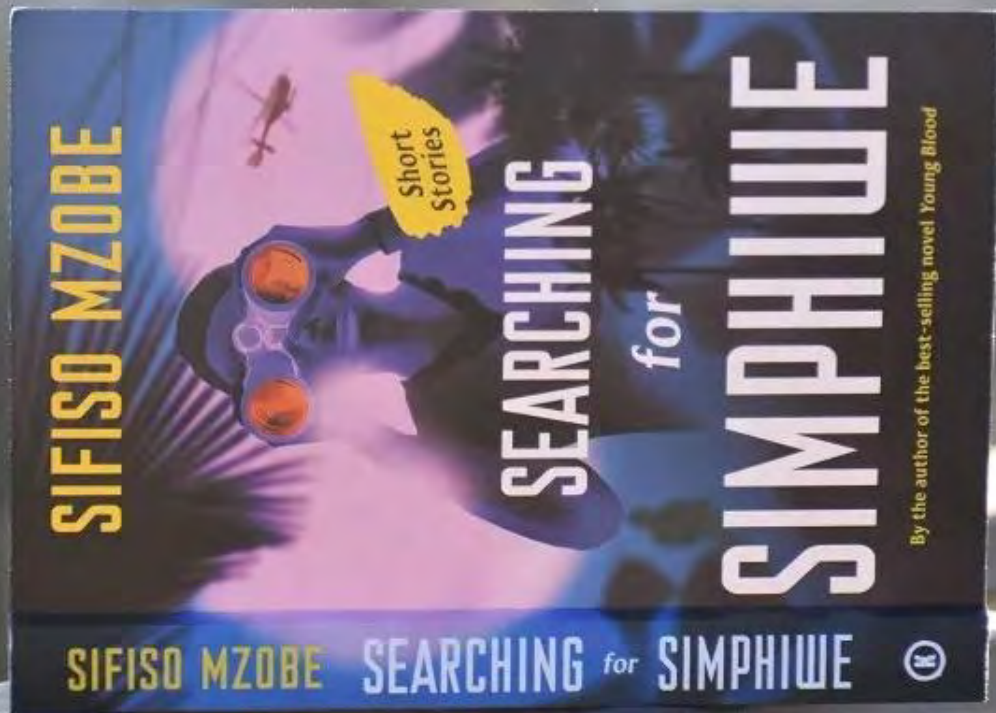
I need to first admit that Mzobe has outdone himself with this book. The stories in this book position him as one of the artful writers in contemporary South African literature.

In *Searching for Simphiwe*, Mzobe narrates eclectic short stories that form part of the complexities of contemporary South Africa. Crime, addiction, femicide, religious beliefs, love, unemployment, corruption, police brutality, sibling rivalry, and mental illness are some of the themes that form part of the stories being dished out in this offering.

Now, I need to admit that even though I was not born in Umlazi township in Kwa-Zulu Natal province, which is the setting of all the stories in the book.

However, while perusing through the pages I felt that Mzobe was just telling stories that are **similar to what's happening in my own neighbourhood**. Stories of black South Africans in the new democratic South Africa are so alike no matter which part of the country you find yourself in.





If you are not unemployed, you are bound to know someone in your township/village who is suffering from drug addiction like Simphiwe or you know children who are kidnapped all the time like Philasande.

This is brilliant and original storytelling at its best. The scribe makes a reader see themselves in the stories with his crisp writing style. The plotline in all the stories leaves the reader in suspense throughout until the end of each chapter.

However, *On a Knife's edge* is one story that truly touched my heart, because it is one story that continues to dominate news headlines on a daily basis in South Africa.

The only bummer for me is the long chapters and many names that the scribe used. He gave names to many characters who do not necessarily form a huge part of the storylines. This makes it difficult for **readers to remember all the characters' names**.

However, despite all of that, this is a riveting slice of the pertinent issues faced by many South Africans. A must-read book.

Mirror Cracked

Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

Mirror Cracked is set mainly in Rondebosch, Cape Town. A picture-perfect, prayerful, Muslim family gets rocked to its core by double tragedy, resultant in its wheels falling off. Through the two strong characters, husband and wife, Fareed and Azraa, their two children, extended family and friends, Raashida Khan manages to weave an intriguing and steamy tale guaranteed to take the reader on a roller coaster of emotions.

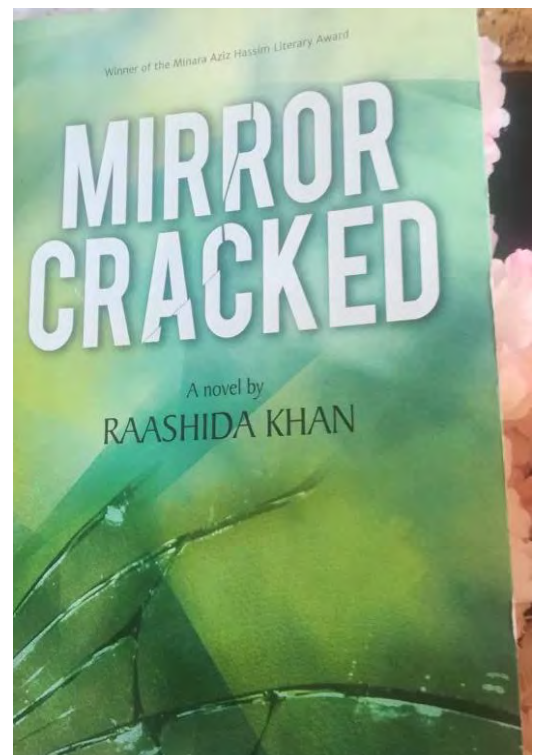
In the book, the old learn from the young. Zack, being the younger of the two lovers **demonstrates through his life the importance of living one's truth as a gay person in present-day South Africa.**

The teenager Zayaana was resilience personified in navigating through her sister's terminal illness. She taught the adults in her life, the magic of playing the cards that one is dealt with. The transformation of Munira from a self-centred, manipulative younger sister, to a reliable pillar of strength for her sister and nieces showed how people can mature and change to the better.

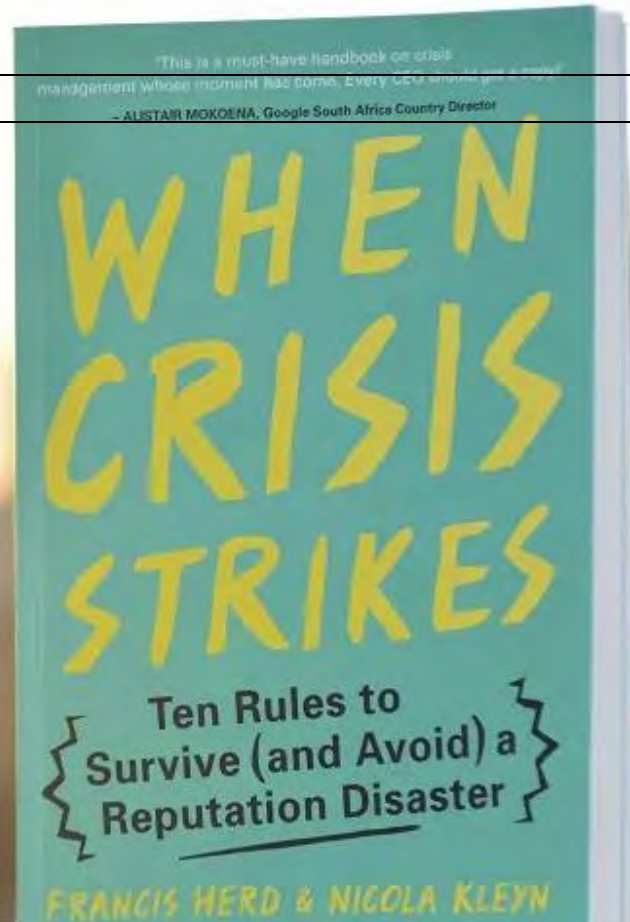
The book started off slow for me. It had not gripped me at the 30-page mark. Only after the introduction of Zack was my interest piqued. Certain events are related more than ones, from the perspective of different characters. I found this repetitive and would most likely be appreciated by a forgetful reader. All sex scenes were penned beautifully, graphic, but not obscene, especially the man on man. Something a reader could do at home.

I resonated fully with the content. Matters of religion, patriarchy, sexuality, family, friendship, career, mental health are cross-cultural. I highly recommend it.

Raashida Khan, is a copywriter, proofreader, content creator, poet, and author of short stories. She started embracing her artistic and literary career after her forty-year milestone. It reminded me of the likes of Tony Morrison, who produced numerous books after her 39th birthday. *Mirror Cracked* is Khan's award-winning debut novel. The sequel *Fragrance of Forgiveness* is available in the market.



Puleng Hopper is an avid reader of mainly African literature.



When Crisis Strikes: A Valuable Tool on How to Regain Reputational Capital After Messing Up

Have you ever wondered what your favourite company or a public figure should have done when their reputation and image was in tatters or measures, they should have taken in order to regain their good image and public trust after having suffered reputational damage?

Well, the truth is that every company, organisation, public figures all go through a rough patch, which could dent their reputation at some point. Now, Francis Herd and Professor Nicola Steyn have joined hands in providing companies, executives, and public figures on how to survive a reputational disaster in their well-researched book titled, *When Crisis Strikes*.

The book provides the ten practical rules or guidelines which companies, executives and even public figures can follow in order to survive reputational damage and most importantly, how they can regain their reputation and good image after having faced a crisis. The scribes use the practical examples of local and multinational companies and executives who either failed or successfully managed to reclaim their reputation and good image after having faced a bad reputational crisis.

Now, as I was perusing through the book, the names of Khusela Diko and Bandile Masuku kept coming to my mind. Diko, President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesperson and Masuku, who

is the MEC of Health in Gauteng have since become the faces of corruption on the **government's tenders of Personal Protective Equipment in the fight against Covid-19** pandemic.

The duo, who have since been put on special leaves, have suffered serious reputational damage in the face of the public. I strongly recommend this book to both of them in their bid to recover their image in the public face. The lessons in this book might help them recover from this disaster, especially rule 4, *Apologise If You Messed Up*, might be what they need to do.

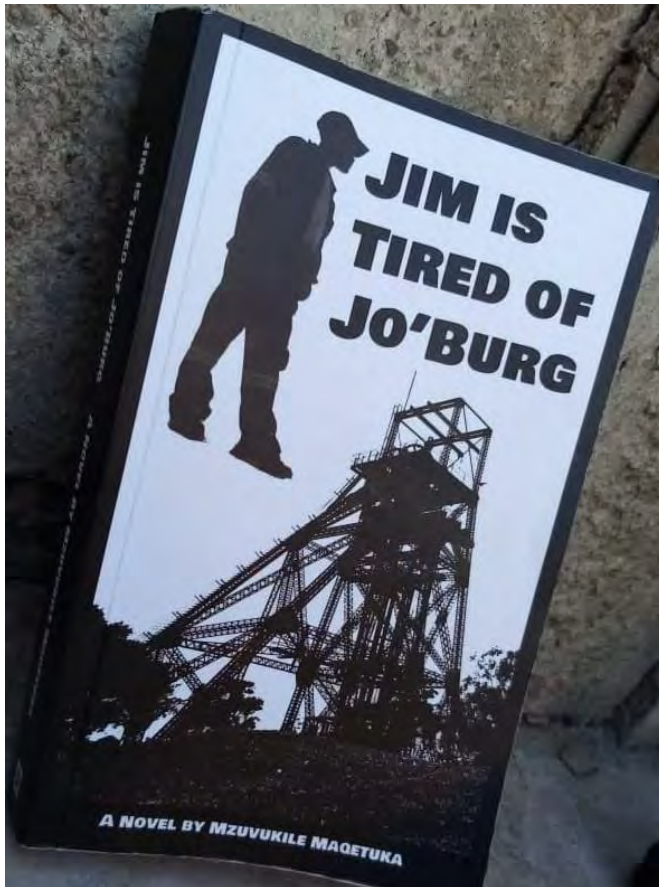
This is a book which will help many people, especially those in the public eye and suffering from reputational damage to find ways to recover from that. What Francis and Nicola did in **this book is exceptional and will not only save many companies and people's reputation, but** will also save the livelihood of so many other people because companies and executives will know better how to avoid a crisis that can lead to the shutdown of a company.

This is an insightful book and a must-read for every leading figure and companies across the globe. Even though the text is richly academic, the book is an easy read with simplistic language and contributes to the communication and reputational management literature.



Jim Is Tired of Jo'Burg

Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)



At a tender age of 16 years-old, the protagonist Kgalatsana Monare also known as TM, with the assistance of The Native Recruitment Company, travels from Dinokana village in the Bahurutsi district near Zeerust to seek employment in the gold mines of Johannesburg.

TM metamorphosises into a clever prone to rodomontade. He gallivants in the Alexandra township, Jo'burg CBD, Krugersdorp and King William's Town. We are let in on his love affairs, his friendships, work, and his stint in the penitentiary. The most embarrassing was that he visited home once in more than 20 years. As a result, he missed both of his parents' funerals. Eventually, TM realized that East, West, South and North, home is best.

The book broaches the emotive subject of internal migration, dual homes, apartheid geographical infrastructure,

its impact on Black life, livelihood and family units. I was successfully transported to the contrasting rural and urban landscapes of 1960 to 1980. The modes of transport and communication, fashion, music, and manner of speaking. *Jim Is Tired Of Joburg* is a generous offering that contains history nuggets and effective lively dialogue.

The tsotsi taal, Setswana, IsiZulu, Afrikaans and Fanakalo, make the read textured and authentic. However, the English translations in brackets may be destructive to a reader who understands the said languages.

The book is also a story of love, heartbreak, friendship, family secrets, sibling rivalry, survival, shame, and regrets. The author, Mzuvukile Maqetuka hails from the Eastern Cape. He has published two books of photography titled, *Impressions Of My Hometown* initially published in (2012) and *The Sahrawis: A photographic book on the Sahrawis Refugee Camps* (2016). His two books of short stories are titled *Children From Exile and Other Stories* (2015), and *Camdeboo Stories* (2017).

In 2016, he published a biography of his grandparents, *I Will Write This Story*. Maqetuka also contributed to a book titled *Black Tax* edited by [Niq Mhlongo](#).

BRUTAL SCHOOL TIES

Sam Cowen

BRUTAL SCHOOL TIES

The Parktown
Boys' Tragedy

Sam Cowen

mf

Brutal School Ties: An Honest Account of How the Rogue System at Parktown Boys' High School Destroyed Young Souls

The death of young Enock Mpianzi rightly exposed the recklessness and negligence of **Parktown Boys' High School management. Enock's death shook the entire nation and one that will forever put a dent on the school's image for years to come.**

However, even before Enock's death brought the school to public glare, Parktown Boys' High School was already known for sexual crime stories that hogged the headlines a few years prior. A monster (yes I call him a monster) called Collan Rex terrorised, brutalized, sexually assaulted and broke many young boys at the school.

Rex was sentenced to an effective 23 years in prison after he was found guilty on counts of sexual abuse and common assault. His misdemeanours as Waterpolo coach at the school finally caught up with him.

In this thoroughly researched book called *Brutal School Ties-The Parktown Boys' Tragedy*, respected author, Sam Cowen chronicles all these events that took place prior, during and after the arrest of this monster, Collan Rex.

She does this by interviewing the boys who were **sexually assaulted by Rex, their parents, school's officials, officials who were involved in the case, Rex's family including his girlfriend and mom** and finally, the monster himself.

Now, I need to first give credit to Sam. She has done a great job in giving all the parties a chance to state their side of the story, even though one could have easily decided to be biased in such an emotional case involving the sexual assault of minors.

Perusing throughout the pages, the professionalism of Sam is dominant throughout the book, as she follows all the journalistic protocols. She goes as far as seeking permission from parents to speak to the boys first and also hiding their true identities.

As a parent reading this book, I was shattered, depressed, confused and angry. I was angry at **how Parktown Boys' High School management** and the School Governing Body allowed the culture of brutality, violence and sexual predation to thrive in the school system for years.

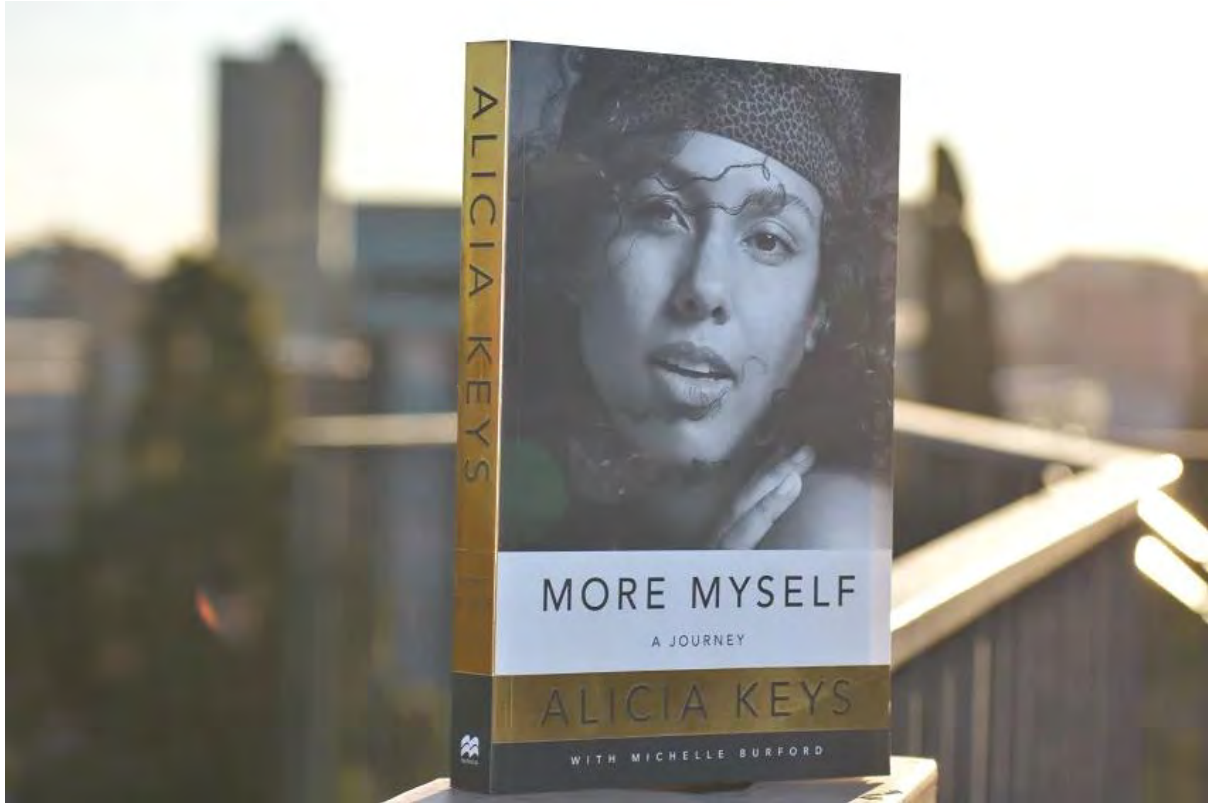
Boys have been violated, raped, molested, and **destroyed emotionally under the school's system** and it had to take a young boy(call him Ben) to put an end to all of that by exposing Rex, who was **himself a product of the school's brutal system.**

While this is not a book to open old wounds, especially for the victims and their families, however, this is one book that will make every parent think twice before sending their children **to board at Parktown Boys' High school or any boarding school** for that matter, because this culture of bullying, brutality and sexual predation has been normalized in many boarding schools.

The urgency and importance of this book cannot be understated and every learner, parents and the entire society really need to read it, because it seems like our so-called **'good schools' have** turned into brutalising spaces for our young souls.

As for Collan, accepting God in your life does not mean everyone should just forget about your sins like that, it means you should accept your sins fully and allow survivors of your horrific deeds find a place in their hearts to forgive you. This is a must-read book

More Myself: Celebrating Alicia in her Fullness



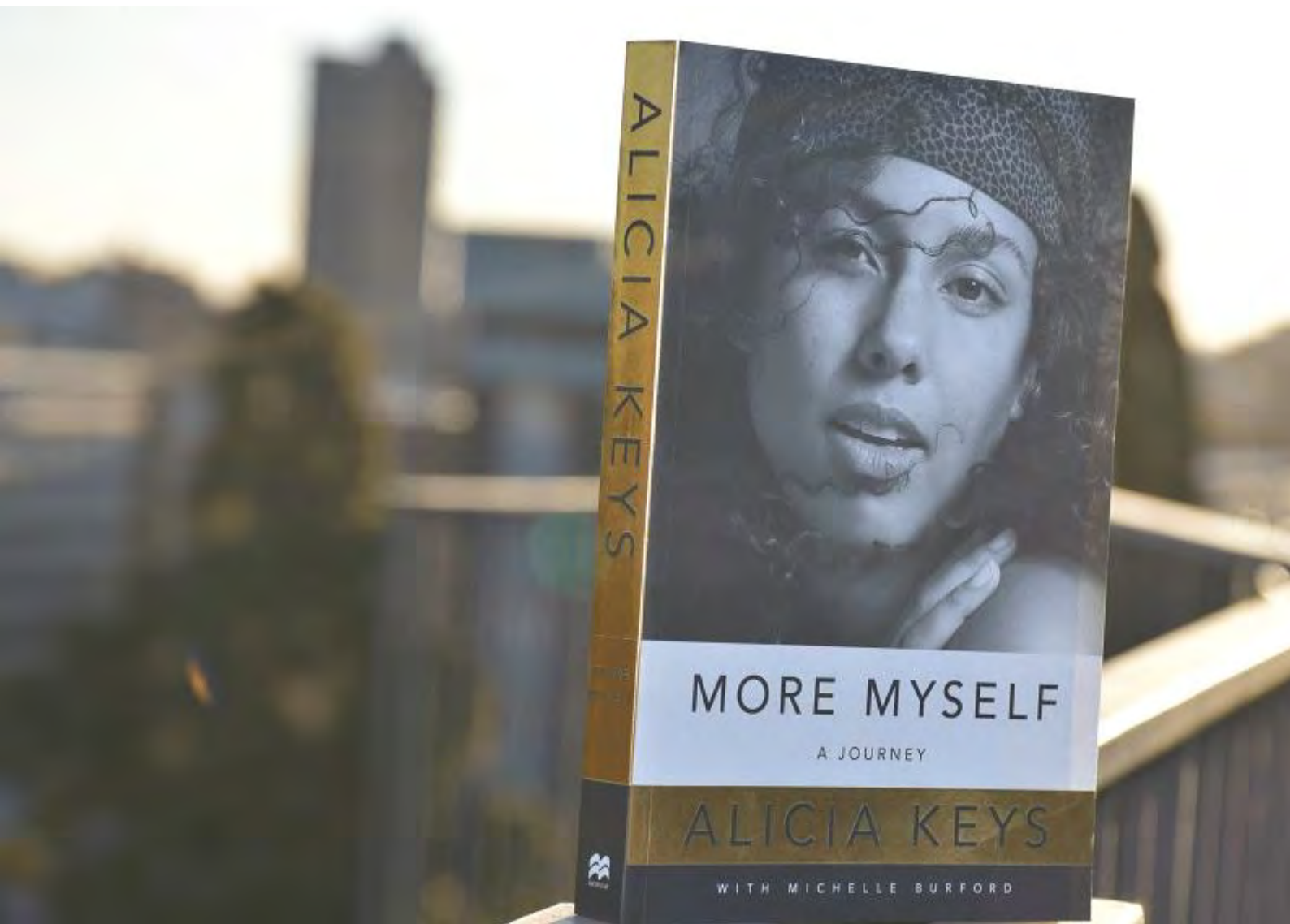
It is befitting that I kick-started the women's month by reading about the personal life, career, successes, and future dreams of one of the leading women in the world, Alicia Keys.

While the book was released just before women's month here in South Africa, however, I personally take this book as a gift to many women across the globe, especially South African women as they celebrate a month of their own.

In this autobiography boldly titled *More Myself- A Journey*, 15-time Grammy award-winning singer, songwriter, and producer, Alicia Keys not only documents her childhood experience in **Hell's Kitchen**, her extraordinary singing career, her married life to her superstar husband or her difficult relationship with her daddy, but she opens up to the world about who she really is in all her entirety.

In a world which continues to define and force identities, and police women's bodies on a daily basis, Alicia emerges as a victor who refuses to be defined and controlled by our heteropatriarchal society. She chooses to self-identify and self-determine.

Perusing through the pages of this book, I was left encouraged, motivated, inspired, and most importantly educated as a man living in a world that is anti-women. While many women will **be inspired by how Alicia won the battle against society's oppressive beauty standards**, such as only wearing make-up whenever she likes and not be forced by society to do that in order to be called beautiful.



As a man reading this book, I was left **educated about the importance of a man's role and his presence in the lives of his children, especially their daughters. While reading through this beautiful story of Alicia, one cannot miss the point that Alicia's father, who was absent throughout her childhood, is not really a key person in her life. Despite their present cordial relationship, it becomes clear through the pages of this book that the man is not the most important person in Alicia's life, and it seems he will never be.**

This point is proved even further in the acknowledgement part, where the author acknowledges everyone for their role in her journey to this point but not her father. This will be a lesson to young fathers that it is important to really be there for our children at a very young age, be present in their growing up and play our part in terms of building relations with them no matter our differences with their mothers.

More Myself proves that Alicia Keys is more than an artist, a mother, wife, social justice activist, fierce feminist and a songwriter, but she is a woman who knows who she is and appreciates herself before the world. This book is a gift to many young girls and boys that it is important to forever remain true to oneself and refuse to be defined by the world and its endless demands. This is a beautiful read from a beautiful soul.

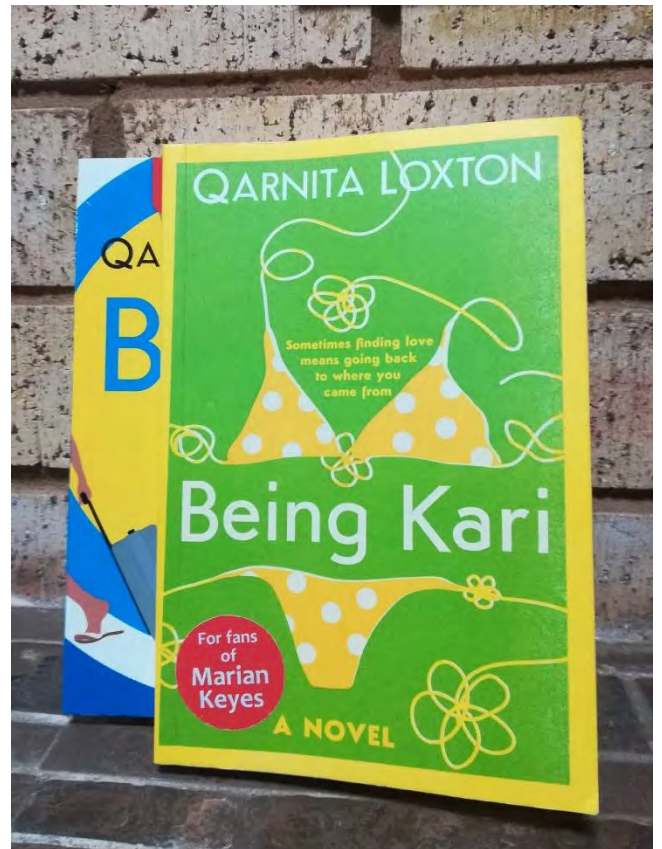
Book Review: Being Kari

Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

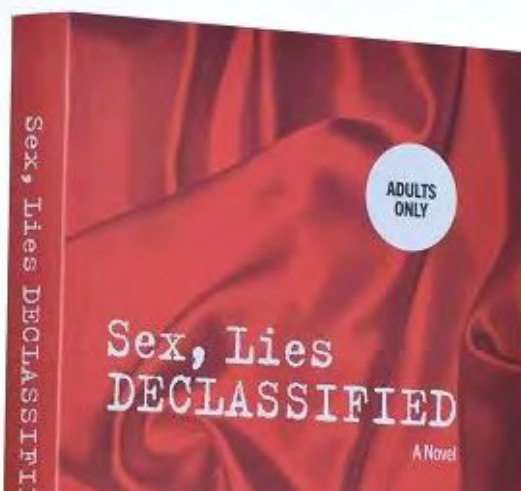
In *Being Kari*, Qarnita Loxton writes of serious topics, patriarchy, religion, divorce, infidelity, abortion, marriage, family, friendship and pregnancy, in a light and funny way without trivializing them. It had been 10 years since 31-year-old Kari ran away from her Muslim home amidst a scandal. On Valentine's night devoid of romance, Kari discovers that her husband had cheated on her. As if that is not enough, her 85-year-old grandmother back home suffers a heart attack. In the commotion that ensued, her mom tumbled down the stairs and broke her leg.

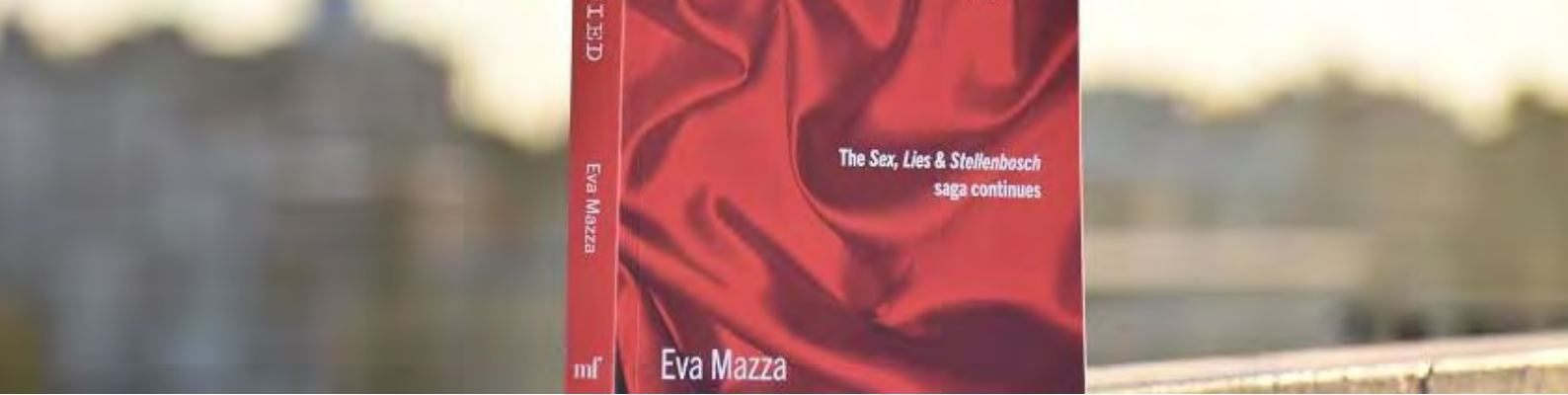
Kari, as a result, is urgently summoned back home. In her capacity as the only grandchild, she has to assist with everything that is happening. Ouma has to be buried within 24 hours.

A curtain then opens on more drama that involves her family, friends and community. Kari's past and present collide. I could not put the book down. At times Kari gave me palpitations with her slaap gat attitude and propensity to complicate things.



She was a pro at bringing awkward moments upon herself through stalling. I loved the cover too. So much story in the polka dot swimsuit. The book is the first of a trilogy. There is "Being Lily" (2018) and "Being Shelly" (2020). Although it has been said that the books can be read independently, I would rather you read the books in chronological order for perspective. I can't wait to start on "Being Lily" soon. The Essops and Rafig's worst nightmare.





Sex, Lies Declassified: An Entertaining, Informative, and Page-Turning Tale of Stellenbosch's Secret Lives

It has been a while since I have read a book accompanied by a bold instruction that says: **“Adults Only”**. Eva Mazza’s second and “middle baby” titled *Sex, Lies Declassified* is certainly not for the faint-hearted. We can all agree that if there is a person who knows how to air the dirty laundry of Stellenbosch in fiction writing, that honour should deservedly go to Eva.

She has once again delivered a scandalous, saucy, and gripping second novel that will leave the readers asking for more once they are done reading it.

In *Sex, Lies Declassified*, which is the sequel of Mazza’s debut novel, *Sex, Lies & Stellenbosch*, she picks up where she left off with all the stories that made her one of the best storytellers in the country. The protagonist, Jen Pearce (I hope her surname will change in the third book) is a changed woman, who has grown in confidence and is living her best life away from the drama of Stellenbosch, even though the drama still very much demand her attention.

It is often said the more things change, the more they remain the same, this is so true with regard to the likes of John Pearce and Frankie Holms. Now, I need to give huge credit to Eva in this book.

There are a few things I look forward to seeing when I am reading a sequel. One, character development, have characters evolved from the previous book and of course, the most important thing, the storyline, does the story move forward from the previous book. And here is where I believe Eva has masterfully shown why she is one of the artful writers in contemporary South African literature.

While themes such as racism, adultery, rape, and friendship still form a huge part of her storytelling, the **story has moved along nicely with characters driving the plot**. John Pearce’s character is one that I find to have evolved deeply. Readers not only know that John does have strong political views about the current trajectory of our country now, but he is also a racist and rapist, yes I said it, John Pearce is a rapist.

It is in John's character that I think Eva convey a very important message of sexual abuse in this country. Eva shows that rape is rape even if two people have had numerous sexual encounters with each other previously, for as long as there was no consent between the two parties, that is rape and that is what John did to Frankie. He raped Frankie and I hope in the third book, he will pay for his sins.



Eva Mazza's debut novel published in 2019

Sadly, for many women like Frankie, the only option that seems to be available to them after having gone through that assault is to take their lives, because it will be difficult to prove that they have indeed been sexually assaulted because the perpetrators are people who they had numerous sexual encounters with and even seduced them at some point. I feel sad about how **Frankie's life come to** an end because it is something that is happening every day in this country, where women will end up committing suicides after having gone through sexual abuse.

I like how Eva kept the same structure throughout, with short chapters that end with nail-biting cliff-hangers. Eva is a brilliant storyteller and I cannot wait for the third instalment of these series. This is an entertaining, informative, and page-turning tale of Stellenbosch's secret lives.

Untimely Beginnings: A Gripping Read of Widows Sharing the Before and Aftermath of their Husbands' Unexpected Deaths

Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

Untimely Beginnings- Memoirs of Women Who Defied Fate is an anthology that includes contributions of 17 widows across various ages and race. 14 of the women are Black. The other women are American, Coloured and Indian. The women share about themselves, their respective families, and their marriages. They bare mainly about their experience after the unexpected passing of their husbands. The impact and reactions. How they coped with the children, work, and the community at large. The contributors relate of their grief and individual journey of healing.

The book not only evokes sympathy and centres on grief. It also gives hope, encouragement, and empowerment to those affected by death in general. Lindela was 30 and heavily pregnant, their son was three, and the husband was 33 when he died in a vehicle collision outside the country. Nandi was in a marriage for a mere 15 months when her husband Mbulelo tragically crossed over. **Nonyameko's husband, Kenny, committed suicide at the time that they were estranged from each other.** I think the drama from the in-laws was underplayed here.

A sad, sensitive, emotive, but inevitable topic. A fact of our lives, death. The stories demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness. An example of how hard and deep women can love. Most of the women were not prepared and did not re-marry after their ordeals. The women fell, had to stand up, dust themselves off and carry on. Zenzile Makelo in her story on **page 120 wrote.** **"The world does not wait for you, simply because you are grieving. Bills must be paid, and children must go to school, you must quickly define your new normal"**

I felt that the individual voices of the ladies were lost in transition and translation. One voice, one style of narration, probably of the interviewer and compiler, was dominant.

My least favourite story was that of Lady Dee. Her name does not quite meet the real name policy. It seems cat fishy. Although the story holds lessons in independence, friendship, resilience and shunning the elements of tradition that are oppressive. I experienced the narration to be aloof. Unlike the other contributors, she does not mention husband, the kids and her area by name. As if she wanted to remain incognito. It took away from her story.

Overall, this is a great book. Our stories that are close to home, that resonate across various cultures. **This could be your story, your aunt's, your mom's or your grandma's. I recommend the book highly**



Indaba, My Children: Undiluted Black History Documented by Isanuse Credo Mutwa

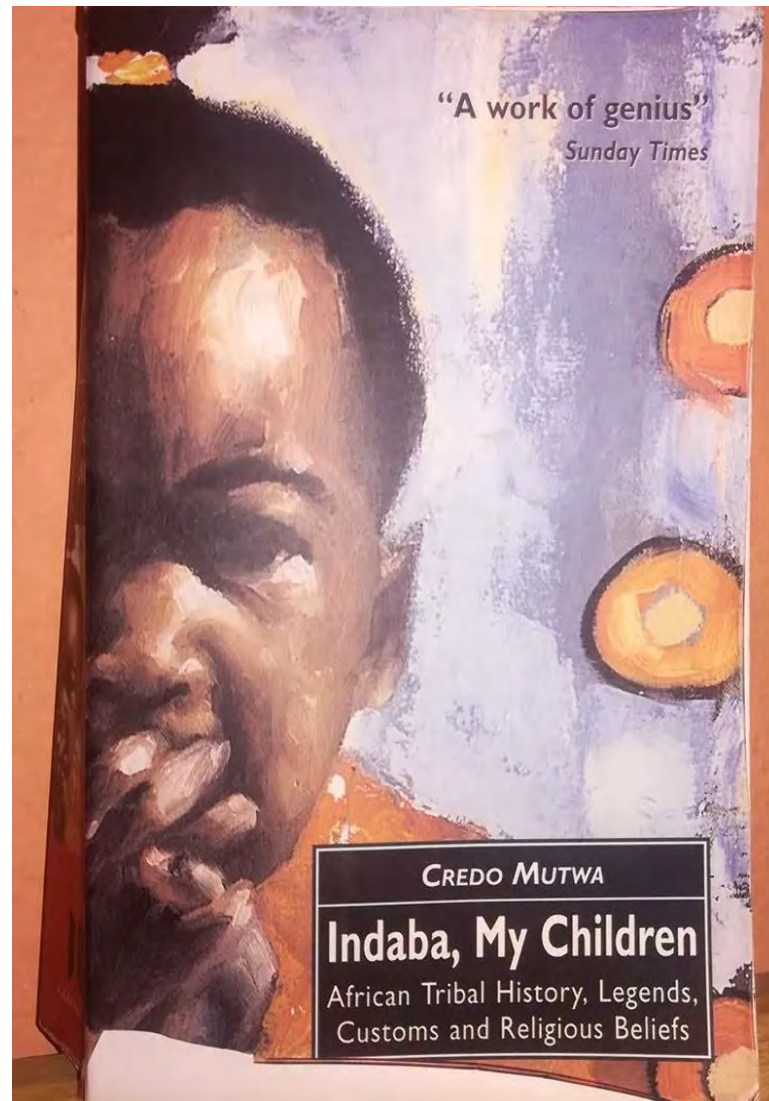
Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

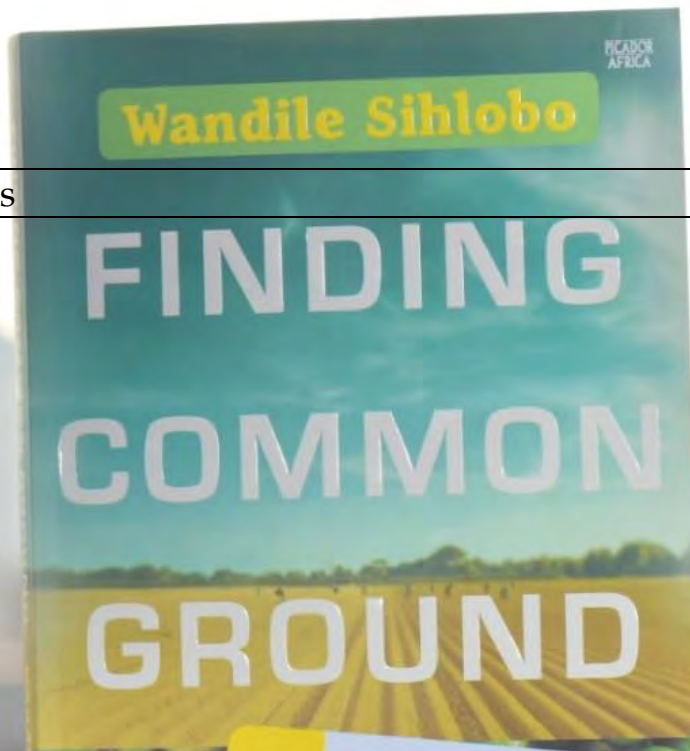
Sage, author, storyteller, sculptor, seer, academic, politician and traditional healer, Vusamazulu Mutwa was a phenomenal selfless being. A priceless gift to Africa. He was like Google on two legs. An honorary doctorate of sorts would have been befitting for him. But, alas, we, South Africans are in the habit of **singing our hero's praises late, or after they** have passed away. His immense contribution to the preservation of African indigenous knowledge via books, sculptures, paintings and word of mouth was invaluable.

I am happy to have made *Indaba, My Children* my lockdown read and have managed to finish and to make sense of the 696 pager. In his debut book, Mutwa documented Black life and existence in pre-colonial and the early colonial era. It is a lyrical, informative and well-penned offering of poems, legends, reflections, and documentation of actual historical **events. He covers abantu's childbearing and rearing**, marriage, medicine, education, justice, land, food, animals and customs.

He helps contextualize the meaning of words like savage, civilization, heathen, witchcraft and primitive. A necessary body of work which affirms Black greatness, resourcefulness, wisdom and resilience. A testimony that Black people were pathfinders in many fields before Africa was colonised, misrepresentation of the Black history by non-Black historians and, the African belief of keeping knowledge and information a secret, to be divulged only to the Chosen Ones, motivated Mutwa to write, and to reveal all, to educate and to prevent erasure.

He draws extensively from his travels all over the world, lived experience, African mythology, Christian and African religions. A book that reflects who Blacks are, their roots and origin. A coping mechanism as we manage the duality and double standard that has become our current existence. Furthermore, it is a reminder that African religion is not witchcraft.





Finding Common Ground: Wandile Sihlobo's Thoroughly Probed Account on How Agriculture Can be a Vehicle for Economic Development

South Africa's unemployment rate is expected to rise in the coming months as a result of Coronavirus pandemic and the government's lockdown. Many companies continue to shut their doors, while some have retrenched employees to further add more woes on the country's current high unemployment rate. The current employment rate sits at 29.1% with young people and a mostly blacks dominating the biggest chunk of that percentage.

While the consensus is that the current unemployment level is unacceptable, the big question has always been, what practical measures should be taken to curb the ever-increasing number of South Africans without jobs?

Agricultural economist, Wandile Sihlobo in his debut book titled *Finding Common Ground*, paints a positive picture on how South Africa's agricultural economy can be an answer to the country's unemployment crisis. *Finding Common Ground* is a selection of Sihlobo's previously published articles on the two most important issues. Firstly, how the government's sound policy on land reform can unlock job opportunities for many South Africans, especially the youth and women. Secondly, how South Africa's agricultural sector can be a driver for economic development for many rural communities across the country.

The scribe thoroughly discusses the land reform conundrum in the opening parts of the book. The land question is a major factor to consider if South Africa's agricultural economy will be a shining sector of economic inclusivity to all South Africans. Now, I need to admit that I am one of the young peoples who used to perceive the agricultural sector as a space for older and unskilled people. I can safely admit that Sihlobo has successfully managed to change my long-held negative perception throughout the pages of this book. I was quickly drawn to the chapters that focused on youth and women participation in the agricultural sector.

Many young people, especially blacks and Coloureds continue to still see agriculture as ‘unsexy profession’ for lack of better word. They will rather study popular courses in universities with full knowledge of limited opportunities provided by those professions, rather than pursuing agriculture as their profession of choice.

Now, while Sihlobo fully understands the negative perception of many young South Africans, he admits that the onus is on people in the agricultural sector to showcase economic opportunities that are available in the sector and that in return, will force many young people like me, to be able to find the sector as more viable career-choice to pursue like it was for him. What I liked also is how he fiercely calls for the inclusion of women in the sector, who continue to be marginalized in many agribusinesses boardrooms and farms.

This is a book that will make agriculture become a dominant day-to-day conversation not only to women and young people in South Africa, but also to policymakers, agribusinesses, and government leaders across the continent of Africa as a whole.

While all the players in the public and private sectors, and together with South Africans of all races have found a common ground on the need for land reform in the country, which gave **name to the title of the book. It is President Cyril Ramaphosa’s administration that needs to** deal with the land expropriation matter with the urgency and carefulness it requires, in order to seize the opportunities in the sector, especially opportunities presented by cannabis.

In *Finding Common Ground*, Sihlobo has proven why he is a leading young voice in the agricultural sector. I fully recommend that President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa, get themselves a copy of this book. There are lessons for both their administrations, lessons that can change the economic trajectory of their respective countries from an agricultural perspective.



Book Review: WILL, the Passenger Delaying Flight

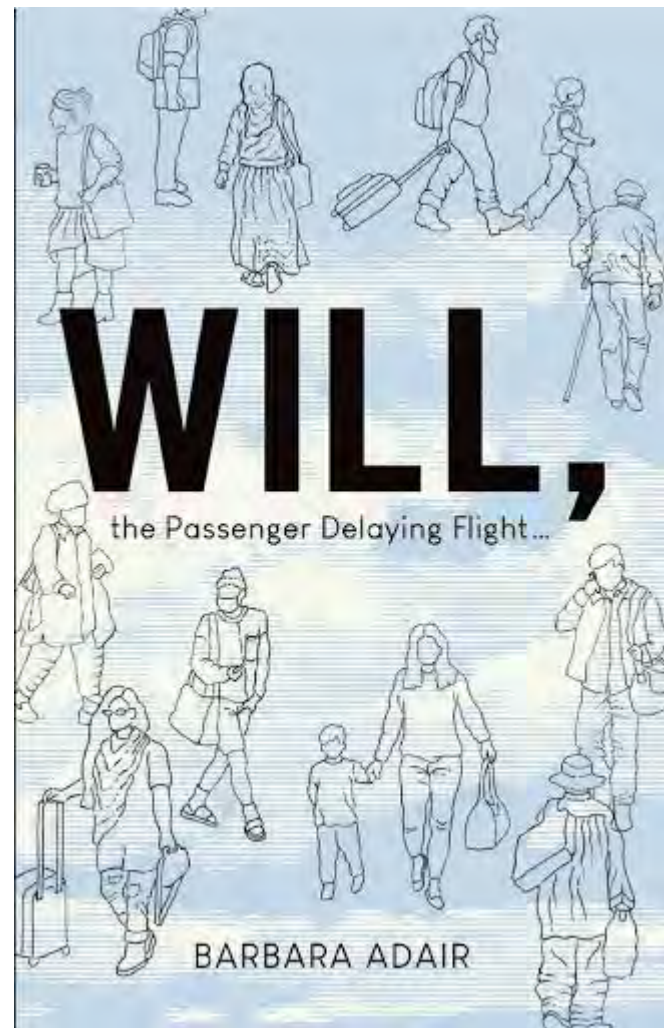
Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

WILL, the Passenger Delaying Flight is the third novel of attorney, researcher and author Barbara Adair. Her other two books, *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot* (2004) and *End* (2007) were shortlisted for the *Sunday Times* Fiction Award and the African Regional Commonwealth Prize, respectively.

Adair resides in Limpopo and Joburg. She currently works with Wits Writing school. Some of her travel articles, queer literature and reviews can be found at www.barbara-adair.co.za.

The story is anchored at an international airport (Charles De Gaulle). A German, Volker, is en route to Africa, Namibia specifically, on a one-way ticket. Plagued by melancholy, he is leaving behind **misfortune and disappointment**. Through Volker's analytical and reflective disposition, we encounter various interesting characters. A disgraced professor. A male porn star named Dick. A murderer. A thief. The richest homeless man. A womanizing dwarf. A paedophile. A human trafficker. A trans-woman and plenty of others.

This book is a literary experiment that is unique in structure and presentation. It is thought-provoking, graphic, witty, and shocking in a nonchalant fashion that includes a skilful play of words.





Two Minutes to Midnight

**WILL RAMAPHOSA'S
ANC SURVIVE?**

Oscar van Heerden

Two Minutes to Midnight: Reflecting on the Shenanigans of Nasrec and Ramaphosa's Future on the ANC's Hot Seat

Jacob Zuma is the latest ANC leader to have lambasted the ANC's Nasrec conference after Tokyo Sexwale had also expressed the same sentiments. Money-infested, the billion rand election, unANC. These are some of the words used to describe the ANC's 54th National Elective Conference at Nasrec in December 2017. The conference, which saw Cyril Ramaphosa defeating Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for the presidency post continues to be described by many people inside and outside the party as one where money played a formidable role in determining the outcomes.

In this late post-reflection of the conference, Oscar van Heerden in his book simply titled *Two Minutes to Midnight- Will Ramaphosa's ANC Survive*, transports the reader back to that five-day conference that saw the ANC members fully divided on their preferred leader for the top post. While there have been numerous books written about Ramaphosa's narrow victory since then. Van Heerden, however, gives his own personal and insider's perspective since he was part of the support staff at the conference.

From the singing of divisive songs in the plenary hall, physical confrontations in different commissions, hacking off the CR17 war room cellphones and Jacob Zuma's face upon the defeat of his preferred candidate, Van Heerden dish all of them in this short book. Now, I need to admit that as a political journalist/writer, reading part one and two of the book felt like I am going through old political articles.



Cyril Ramaphosa showing emotions after having been elected as the new ANC President.

The scribe is basically rehashing what is already in the public domain, whether you were at the conference or you were simply following it on the media. Majority of the issues that the author **brings forth are things that are already known. From Ramaphosa's emotional face after the announcement of his victory, the removal of former Jacob Zuma at the Union Buildings, the 2019 general and provincial elections' analysis, Ramaphosa's new cabinet appointment and swearing-in of ministers. There's nothing new that he brings in re-telling those events.**

The first two parts of the book will surely frustrate the reader, especially if you are an avid political reader. I personally believe that if someone will write a book about the Nasrec conference in 2020 or beyond, then the onus is on them to bring new elements to the discussion given the fact that it has been almost over two years since the conference happened. I had also hoped throughout the pages of this book that the scribe will mention, since he was part of the CR17 war room, whether Ramaphosa was aware **of his team's involvement in the bribing of delegates with money and alcohol**, as in most cases, he (Ramaphosa) denies that he had no knowledge of the behind-the-scenes shenanigans.

It is only in the last part of the book where I feel the scribe did justice to the title of the book. **Because that's where he perfectly makes it clear what the Ramaphosa's ANC in government needs to do in order to deal with the country's socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, eradicating poverty, and growing the economy among others.** I think for those who are card-carrying members of the ruling party, this book will refresh their memories and give them a much-needed lesson about the constitution of the ANC.

Van Heerden, who is a veteran of the party, touches a lot on the constitution of the party and how it was previously violated by former President Zuma for years for his nefarious gains. Those ANC members, the so-called **'fightback' cadres led by Ace Magashule, who might have ambitious to use the much-anticipated National General Council(NGC) to remove Ramaphosa as President of the party**, this book will help them understand the rules and the business of the NGC as stipulated in the party's constitution.



Khamr: A Searing Memoir Which Unmasks the Self From Generational Trauma and Oppressions

Riveting, searing, brutally honest, and deeply-informed are some of the superlatives I can use in describing Jamil Farouk Khan's memoir. I need to admit that it has been a while since a book cover lured me in to read. The cover of **Khan's latest offering exhibits full of his face and** what looks like droplets of water. The artwork is inviting and that on its own will sway readers towards making the purchase.

However, it was the title of the book, *Khamr- The Making of the WaterSlams*, that in all honesty threw me off and left me a bit confused. Khamr and Waterslams are Islamic terms of which I am not a subject of. The scribe, however, make amends for that with a proper historical explanation of the two terms in the inside.

In this memoir, Khan takes the reader through his childhood upbringing in a dysfunctional Muslim middle-class family consisting of his alcoholic father, a mother trapped in a loveless marriage, and a rebellious sister. In a typical autobiographical set-up, Khan narrates his story from childhood right up until to the highly respected shadows of Stellenbosch University in his young adult life. However, it is in between that child and adulthood narrative that the book grips my attention firmly. The book touches on numerous themes that will come to shape the life of a man many have come to love and hate, depending on which side of social justice fence you are on.

Generational trauma, racism, addiction, identity, sexuality, queerness, prejudice, religion, whiteness, Colouredness, class, and religious heteronormative patriarchy are some of the themes that **find expression in Jamil's quest to** becoming himself in a homophobic and anti-black society like ours. However, religious heteronormative patriarchy is one theme that truly resonated with me throughout the book. The scribe brutally and unashamedly tackles this constant phenomenon in the Islamic quarters through his own personal experience as a Muslim

man or should I now say as being of Muslim descent.

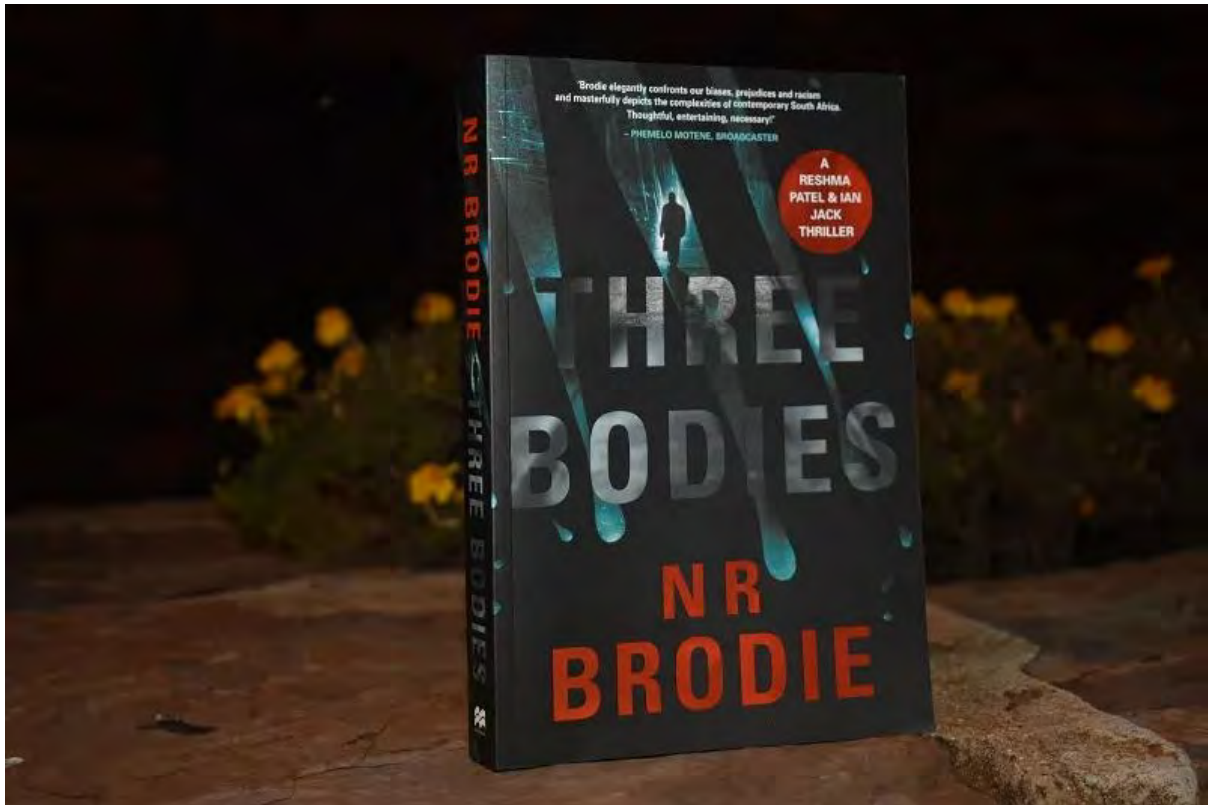
The truth is, heteronormative patriarchy seems to find expression in all the religions, and I will even argue that it is even worse in my own religion, Christianity. It continues to promote misogyny, homophobia, and patriarchy in many **Christian churches across the world.** Khan's dissection opens the window for everyone in their own **"sacred religion" to also** interrogate this phenomenon in the quest to attain social justice.

This is one memoir that will challenge a reader's spiritual/religious intelligence and allegiance. If you are too consumed by your religious patriarchal templates and its conservative nature, **then Khan's assertions will most** definitely upset you, cause discomfort or and even irritate you.

However, if you are willing to thoroughly understand why religion in its entirety continues to suffocate and one major source of depression and discrimination to many queer men and women, then this book will provide an educational window for you. It will provoke your thoughts to not just be a follower of religion but question its ability in promoting justice and equality to humanity. I like the fact that Khan motivates, encourages, and inspires each and everyone in the book to live their lives without succumbing to societal expectations, values, or normalities.

This is a memoir of the 21st century, with shorter **chapters to keep the reader's attention intact** throughout. I must admit that this is a great **addition to South Africa's** ever-growing literature. Khamr creates a lot of debates around a whole lot of issues that still suppress the majority of people in post-apartheid South Africa.

Three Bodies: A beautifully crafted tale depicting acts of unity in seeking justice



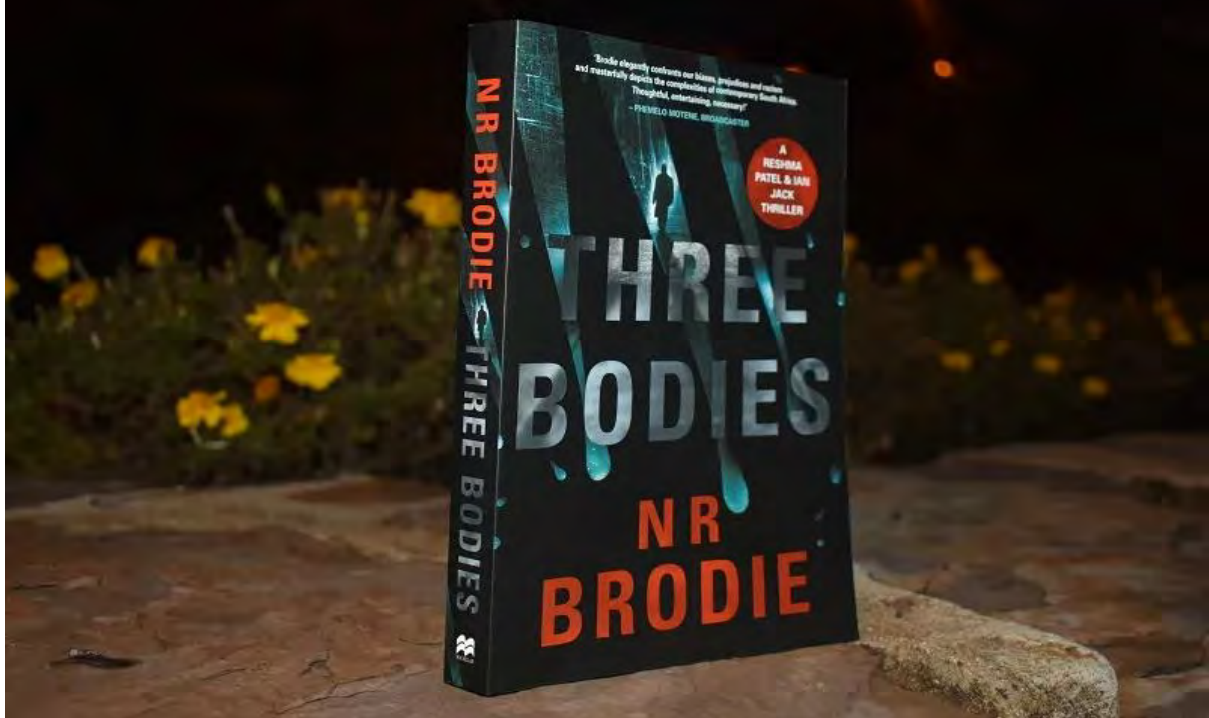
Water is traditionally and spiritually associated with purification, cleanliness, and good life **irrespective of one's beliefs or traditional values**. However, before I could peruse through the pages of *Three Bodies*, the cover page, which depicts what looks like droplets of water falling on a black surface, made me curious.

What does this resemble?

Could it be that in this case water is a sign of life or is there more to this than what meets the eye?

In this crime fiction thriller simply titled *Three Bodies*, author Nechama Brodie unpacks how **captain Reshma Patel and her partner Ian Jack connect the dots on how women's lifeless bodies found in Hartbeespoort Dam, Vaal, and Jukskei rivers could possibly be linked to the increasing number of cash-in-transit heists in Gauteng.**

This is one story that would still be fresh in the memories of many South Africans as the number of cash-in-transit heists dominated the public discourse not so long ago across all the provinces, which caused a national panic.



However, it is the way Brodie, a highly respected journalist, and an expert in violent crime studies narrates the story from the first chapter right through to the last that made me appreciate her descriptive style of storytelling. The manner in which she successfully manages to link the story idea with other social ills is just brilliant.

Crime, justice, femicide, traditional beliefs, superstitions, white privilege, apartheid injustices, **unity, and racism are just a few themes that form part of Brodie's story development** throughout the chapters. However, one theme that truly resonated with me throughout the book was the issue of apartheid injustices. I find it hard to fathom how people who were drivers of mass killings during the apartheid days continue to live lavish lifestyles, while the oppressed continue to dwell at the bottom of the food chain. Brodie successfully paints this painful picture through villain Meneer Snyman and Zebulon September.

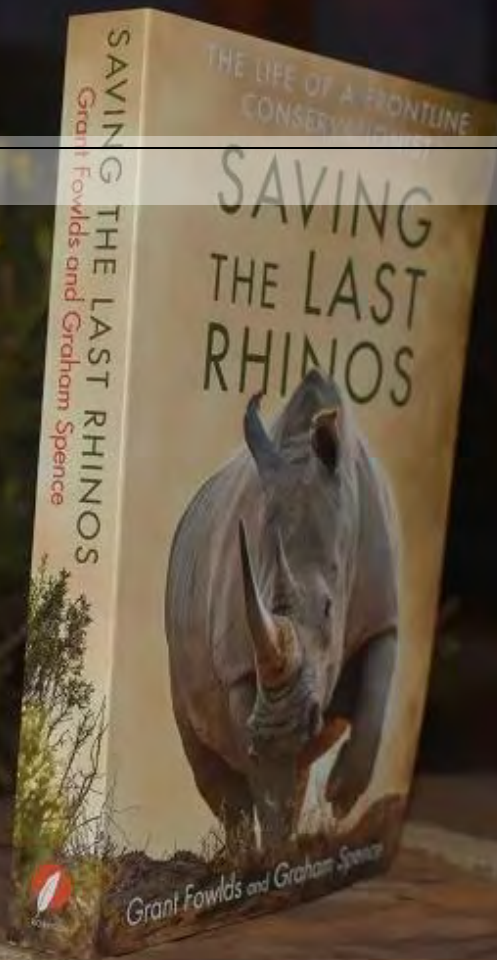
While Zebulon was struggling to make ends meet, the person who murdered his parents lived an expensive lifestyle without having to pay for his previous sins.

Brodie makes it simple for a reader to connect with characters. While the two lead characters are seekers of justice for the vulnerable, they both, however, force the reader to question and appreciate their different personalities. A lot of female police officers and generally working women will see themselves in the struggles that Reshma has to go through. Her credentials are constantly under the microscope in a male-dominated industry. She also has to deal with misogynistic behaviour all the time.

I, however, found myself questioning Ian's unwillingness to confront apartheid legacies very disturbing. In many instances, he feels uncomfortable to talk about the legacy of apartheid, which is something many apartheid beneficiaries fail to address in the new dispensation.

While this is a sequel to **Brodie's previous novel (Knucklebone)**, she successfully delivers the story here without making a reader feeling that they should have read the previous book. This is the type of book that shows that if communities work together with the police, crime and corruption in South Africa can be defeated.

The only bummer is that the book seems to serve justice in the form of death, which will surely leave the reader questioning whether death and not arrest should be seen as justice against the transgressors.



Saving the Last Rhinos: A rallying call to stand against the vicious acts meted against Africa's endangered animals

The African continent is massively blessed with beautiful wildlife animals than any continent on this planet. It is in Africa where the world can fully appreciate and embrace the big five, namely the Lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and Cape buffalo.

However, in recent years, human beings have since declared war with these beautiful creatures for their own selfish and greedy reasons.

African bushes reek of Rhino blood. Their precious horns are somewhat deemed **'high prized commodity'** by wildlife thugs across the globe. *Saving the Last Rhinos*, co-authored by well-known and respected conservationist Grant Fowlds and Graham Spence, is a book that makes a rallying call to everyone to stand against the evil-planned extinction of rhinos on this continent and even the global community at large.

Going through the pages of this book, Grant takes the reader to different bushes and bring closer the most horrific and painful experiences that animals such as the rhino have to endure under the hands of human beings. The stories left me furious and disappointed with my fellow human beings for their selfish behaviour of trying to diminish fellow earthly inhabitants. This is one book that every patriotic African should read in order to understand the severity of this war against rhinos and other endangered animals. The next generation of Africans will surely not know how a rhino looks with a horn if this war is stopped by us now.

What Grant does in this book is to caution everyone and make us really reflect on our behaviour as human beings and ask ourselves what kind of wildlife future do we envision for the future generation. I like the fact that the text is written with an international perspective. The book is written with an international reader in

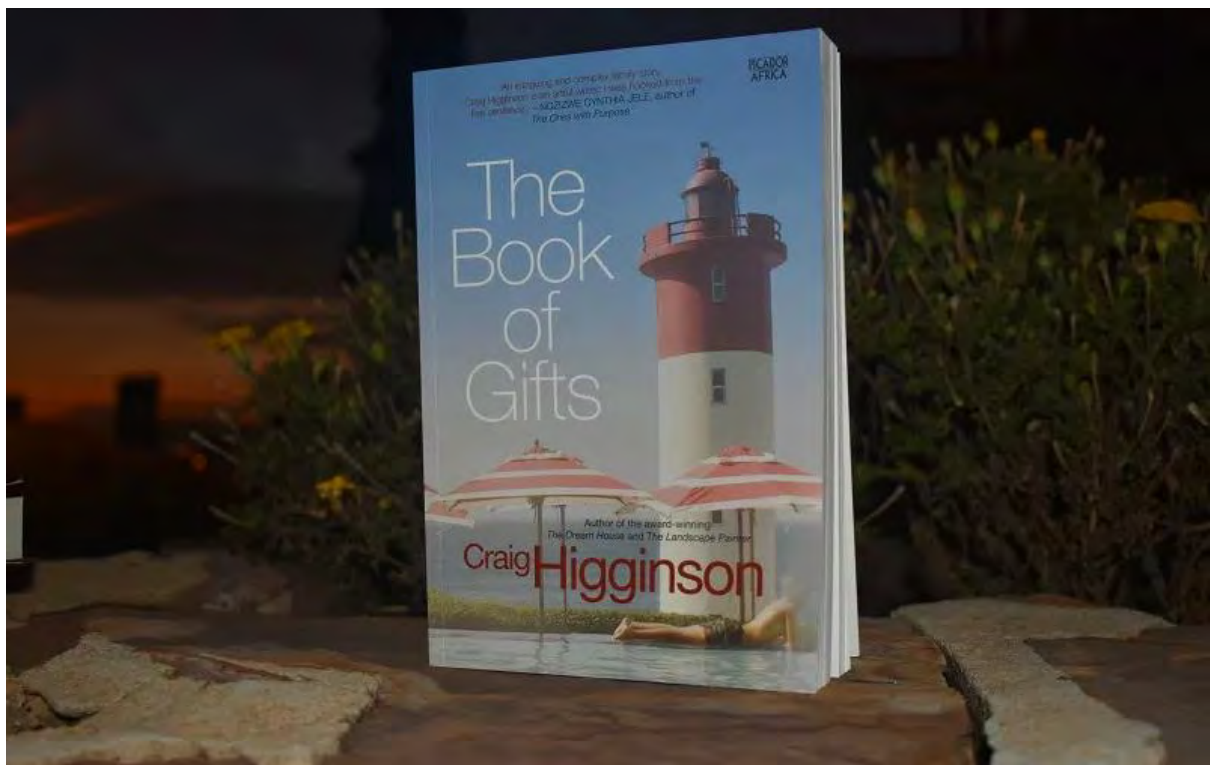
mind as the author continues to translate every South African term in order to punt a unilateral message across.

What I liked about what Grant did in this book is that, while he relays his personal stories about his love for nature and also about his mission to educate the masses on saving the last remaining animals, mostly rhinos through his Rhino Art Project, he also takes us through some of the benefits of pulling together in saving our animals. By protecting our animals, they(animals) can help many communities defeat poverty, unemployment and other social ills that continue to co-exist with many poor Africans across the continent.

Communities can be uplifted through the opening of game reserves and parks since the primary product(animals) will be available to start such projects.

The animals, especially the big five, are a tourist attraction to the continent, and having them alive will boost the tourism sector. It is in our hands to end and act against wildlife crimes. Wildlife warriors such as Grant and others need to be celebrated for being foot soldiers in the fight against those who refuse to exist with our fellow inhabitants of this earth.

The Book of Gifts: A thrilling tale which illustrates that life is full of colourful gifts



My friend, let's just call her X, is a staunch fan of Craig Higginson's writing. For years she has been begging me to review one of Higginson's novels. Now I need to make a disclaimer. Before *The Book of Gifts*, Higginson's latest offering, I'd never read any of his previous work. One thing I can admit now is that I should've listened to my friend X all that time ago. Higginson is truly a gift to South Africa's literary industry and in Chinua Achebe's sentiment, he is 'a bloody' good storyteller.

In *The Book of Gifts*, the author peeks into the lives of two white middle-class families, the Flint family, which is Emma and her son Julian and the Fletcher, Andrew and her wife **Jennifer, who is also Emma's half-sister**. Not to dissuade readers, the story intriguingly revolves around a 15 year-old boy called **Julian. After witnessing an 'unfortunate event' on a holiday with both families in Umhlanga Rocks hotel, the course of his life trajectory takes a major shift. It even affects the lives of those around him.**

While perusing **through the pages, I appreciated how that 'unfortunate event' allowed** Higginson to showcase his prowess in storytelling and how successfully he controls the narrative throughout. He skillfully managed to entice and keep my suspense chapter by chapter. The scribe forces the reader not to put the book down as he leaves the reader with many unanswered questions from chapter one right until the end. This is largely through his unique and impressive manner in which this thrilling story idea has been structured.

The story is told in a backward format, wherein the opening chapters, the scribe slightly paints a scenario that will make a reader want more in the following chapter. He, however, only revert back in full detail to that specific scenario later. It is a risky way of telling a good story because many might interpret that as repetition and lose interest in the process. However, I personally find the style as one that truly hangs the reader on tenterhooks.

Betrayal, toxic relationships, deception, and inequality are some of the themes raised in the book. The characters will also trigger mixed emotions to different readers depending on which moral **side you are on and that is the beauty of Higginson's writing in this book**. Emma really triggered different emotions within me. I found myself wanting to point a finger at her for her **son's life trajectory, but yet again I will see her as Julian's saviour as opposed to her conniving sister**.

I personally believe Higginson should have given the character Jonathan more lines in the story. This would help the reader find out whether he was indeed the biological father of Julian or not. The conundrum leaves the reader hanging and demands clarity at the end of the novel. Besides that little bummer, I believe this is a masterpiece of a novel. Many people will resonate with its storyline, whether you are a white middle-class or a black working-class it makes no difference.

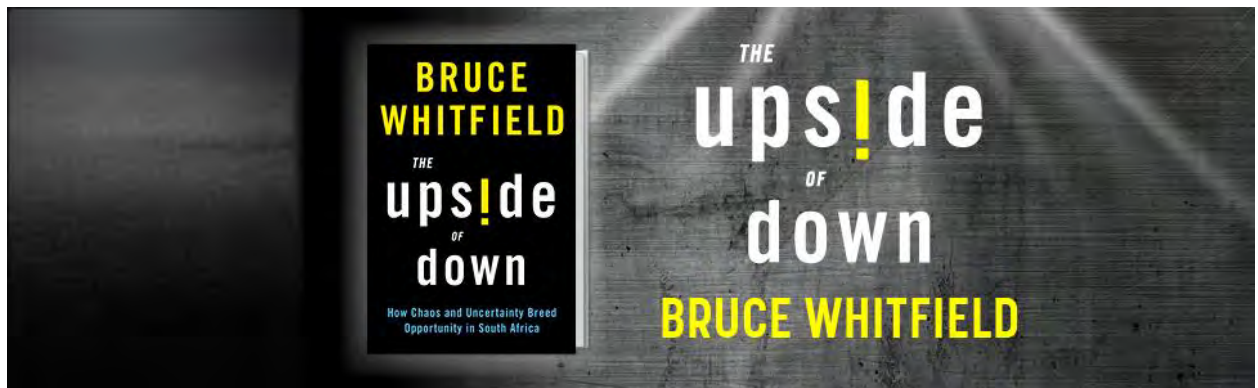


The Upside of Down: A clarion call to all South Africans to talk solutions on the country's socioeconomic travails

” If South Africa was a hospital patient, and the GDP the measure of its pulse, the doctor would be telling relatives to get ready for the worst.”

That is how Bruce Whitfield uprightly describes the current economic trajectory of President Cyril Ramaphosa's administration in his new book simply titled *The Upside of Down-How Chaos and Uncertainty Breed Opportunity in South Africa*. South Africa's socioeconomic travails are well-documented, stubbornly high unemployment rate, high levels of inequality, limping economy, failing state-owned enterprises and recently the uncontrollable spreading of the Coronavirus pandemic.

In this educative and informative political economy book, Whitfield is not rehashing nor reminding us of all our problems that our minds are too familiar with, however, he is making a clarion call to every patriotic South Africans to not despair by the current negative picture, but to collectively take appropriate actions to confront all these challenges that are facing and threatening to make South Africa a 'forgotten country'.



Perusing through the pages of this book, I get a sense that Whitfield like many other patriotic South Africans is tired of forever talking and nursing all the problems confronting us, and he is now pleading with everyone in different sectors, from business, government, civil society, and ordinary South Africans to all come together in finding solutions that will take the country out of its current doldrums. This is public-interest writing at its best.

While the author acknowledges that there were quite a few missteps made in the previous administration of Jacob Zuma, with the sacking of Nhlanhla Nene from the Finance Ministry the backdrop of the current mess, he is adamant that the present crises afford everyone an opportunity to create something good that will benefit the country and her next generation.

Reading this book, I was made to feel like I have a responsibility as a citizen to play my role in seizing up every opportunity to turn around my life for the better. We often cry about how the government is failing to create jobs and rightly so, however, the scribe in no uncertain terms makes it clear that the ball is in our court to create economic opportunities in spaces around

us as he provides numerous examples of how other ordinary South Africans and business leaders successfully achieved their goals in the current undesirable economic climate.

Whitfield's voice in this book is authoritative and one that will require everyone to listen attentively in order to make South Africa great again. *The Upside of Down* reminds us that we, that is all South Africans, poor and rich, have an opportunity to set our economy and our hard-earned democracy on the path of prosperity once more if we keep a positive mindset and work together. I am glad that the often hilarious Whitfield did not use those economic jargons, but a simple language to put his message across even for Petrus in Papierstad to easily comprehend. A must-read for all patriotic South Africans, who want to see South Africa back to her glory days once more.

EW BLOG
In Book Reviews


The story of Poppie Nongena is not for opening up old wounds, but one of love and faith

The Sepedi idiom, “Mosadi o swara thipa ka bogaleng” which easily translate into a mother holds a knife on its sharpest side, best describes Poppie Nongena. Upon finishing reading this riveting memoir of Poppie Nongena, I think that the idiom is a fitting one to describe the horrors and pains that this brave woman had to go through in protecting her one against the odds. This translated edition of Elsa Joubert’s celebrated memoir simply titled *The Long Journey Poppie Nongena*, takes a reader on an emotional ride on how one black woman had to individually suffer, humiliated, and isolated from her own children, husband, siblings, and her community by the racist apartheid regime.

However, through her spiritual conviction, love for her children, religion and family, this unsung heroine not only emerged victorious in a brutal fight against the white rulers, but she defeated the apartheid legislation too. The story of Poppie is one of triumph, resilience, love, and faith in the face of the enemy whose **sole intention is to crush one's soul**. Perusing through the pages of this book, I was left inspired, encouraged, and most importantly saw myself in the painful story of this strong figure of a black woman.

So many South Africans and most especially black women will also easily relate to the challenges that Poppie had to go through during apartheid as many are currently facing the same conditions in the new dispensation. For example, the difference in the living conditions for black women living in rural and urban areas still has not changed. Many women who live in the villages continue to be at the bottom ladder of economic activities due to **government's failure to create economic opportunities next to them and as a result of that are forced to leave their homes without their children, just like Poppie had to move from her 'designated home' in Mdantsane to Cape Town in order to work for children.**



While Poppie was not a renowned political figure in the fight against the apartheid, however, **this story is one that many generations to come should draw their South Africa's historical knowledge from.** I personally believe that this is not a book to open or be reminded of old wounds suffered by Black, Indian or Coloured people during apartheid, however, it is one from which many South Africans can draw strength and inspiration from in the bid to build an inclusive socio-economic society.

It might have made commercial sense for the publisher to use the face of Clementine Mosimane (who is a leading character in the movie which this book is based on) as a cover of the book, however, **I think it would have been even better to use Poppie's picture in order to show the young and coming generations the face of a brave woman who should be celebrated like any freedom fighters in the new dispensation.**

The other bummer I picked was a normal problem that arises with most books which have been translated from Afrikaans to English, as it is the case with this one. The problem that results with many translated versions is that some of the words turn to lose their original meaning and there are plenty in this book. Despite all of that, this is one book that every South African should read to remember this giant figure.

Hassen Ebrahim's memoir "From Marabastad to Mogadishu" is essential reading

Written by [Haafizah Bhamjee](#)

Hassen Ebrahim's memoir titled *From Marabastad to Mogadishu— The Journey of an ANC Soldier* is perhaps the clearest retelling of South Africa's ANC militant past. He is able to transport the reader to the world of the ANC's underground business.

He begins by describing a childhood in the "township" of Marabastad in Pretoria, and emotionally yet accurately describes the forced removals that led his community to Laudium, his schooling and family life. He describes a non-political childhood, but by the time Ebrahim makes his way to Botswana to be counselled by ANC exiles Marius and Jenny Schoon, the story takes a heavily militaristic turn. From recruitment to military training, building bombs and being bombed.

His story follows the untold history of Indian South Africans involved in the ANC. Ebrahim was responsible for setting up multiple underground units and orchestrating pro-Democracy propaganda and education initiatives. Given the militancy it's difficult to imagine that he went from foot soldier to chief executive of the elected Constitutional Assembly which wrote the constitution, served in the department of justice and eventually for the United Nations. He did it all with the same concentrated excellence required of a soldier.

What I found most interesting was Ebrahim's strained family relations and the dynamics of being both an MK soldier, a recruited and armed member of the ANC, and a part of a conservative community. Later his strained marriage. His struggle was not just against the monster of the Apartheid government, but also against his own desire and ambition.

This is an important read in a time when Indian South Africans are experiencing increased racism from politicians and ordinary citizens alike. We need to read and understand the history of Indians in South Africa and the active participation of Indians in the fight for democracy.

From Marabastad to Mogadishu stands out in other ways too. It stands in absolute contradiction to the corruption and state capture characteristic of the ANC today. Ebrahim's sincerity and passion for justice are not uncommon amongst comrades of the old ANC. As Mac Maharaj says in the introduction to the book: "The memoir by Hassen Ebrahim, helps us interrogate that past, appreciate the knowledge and skills we developed both in the struggle to overthrow apartheid and the pursuit post-1994 of a programme of reconstruction and nation-building."

Hassen Ebrahim's memoir is a definite staple for anyone wanting to see the ANC's military wing from an insider's view.

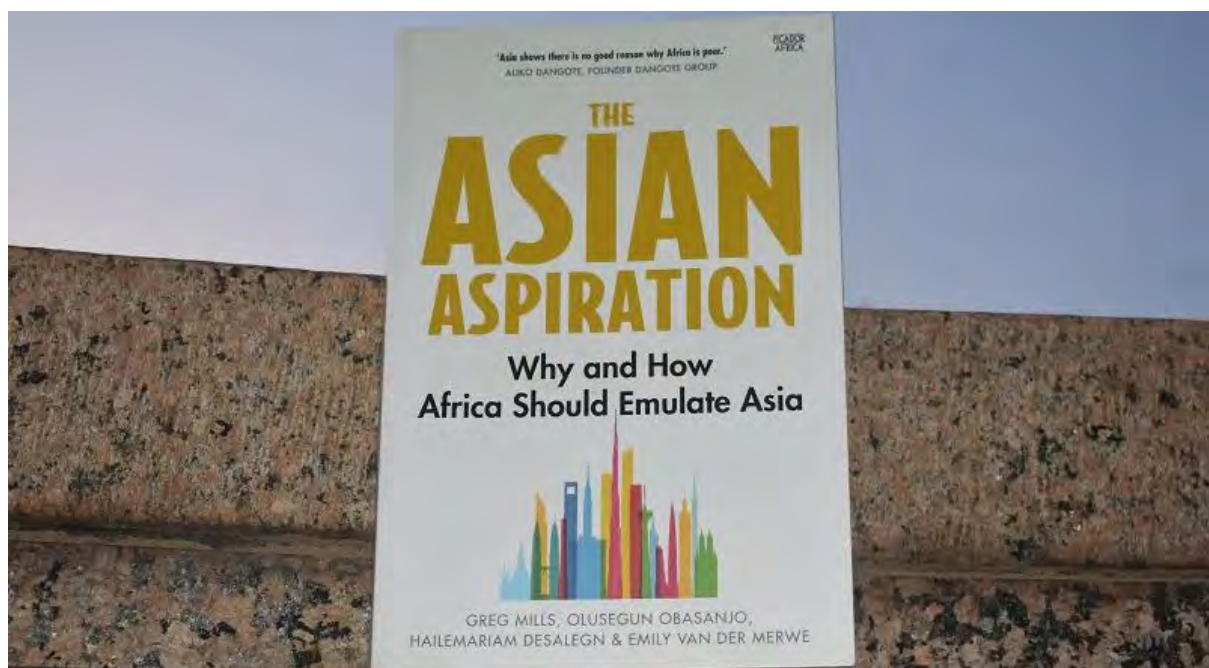


The Asian Aspiration Opens a Debate on Whether Economic Growth Should Trump Democracy in Africa

Africa's population is expected to double in the coming years according to the World Bank. The continent currently has the largest population of young people as compared to other continents across the globe. This means that African governments must create conducive macroeconomic environment to deal with the triple challenges of high levels of unemployment, poverty and socioeconomic inequality if the continent is to successfully rid itself with the 'dark continent' tag.

In their series of books in providing advice to African policymakers, authors Dr Greg Mills, Olusegun Obasanjo, Hailemariam Desalegn and Emily Van Der Merwe echo this sentiment. In their latest edition titled *The Asian Aspiration- Why And How Africa Should Emulate Asia*, they take a look at what African governments can learn from their Asian counterparts in order to improve the economic well-being of many people, especially the poor. The scribes use what they call the 'ten tigers' of Asia (economically advanced countries of Asia) as their case study.

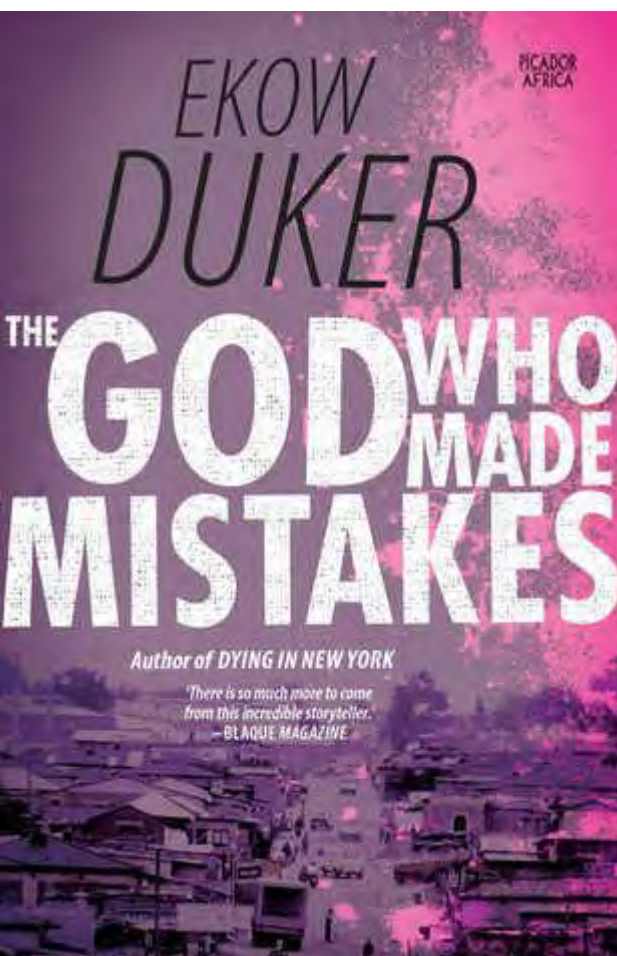
Before I started perusing through the pages, the title of the book left me with so many unanswered questions. Do the authors think all Asian countries are economically and politically advanced as opposed to all African states if the entire continent should emulate them? Secondly, why should Africa emulate Asia while many East Asian countries are under autocratic rule, with China being one of those leading countries under such a system? Upon digging in the content, I think maybe the title of the book could have been made clear that the focus will be on the economic growth lessons that Africa can draw from the East Asian countries and that only, because the generic view creates a bit of misunderstanding.



I was disappointed throughout, as the authors' strategically decided to solely focus on the economic growth of the so-called 'ten tigers' without thoroughly emphasising on the point that democracy is non-existent in those countries. This begs the question of whether economic growth should trump democracy. *The Asian Aspiration* creates a perception that it is okay for governments to only focus on economic growth while neglecting the citizens' basic human democratic rights like the Chinese have done for years, great economy growth story but abuse of human rights and the media by the government.

One positive thing that I think readers, especially current African Presidents can take as a lesson, is how education, accountability and building strong institutions can be used as important vehicles of development for any country. The book is well-researched, more especially the first part of it where many Asian countries such as Singapore and Japan's economic rise from the bottom ladder of the world's economy is fully depicted. The text is very much academic and one that readers will have to take slowly in order to fully grasp it.

The Asian Aspiration is a book that many African policymakers and heads of state should read in their bid to turn the economic fortunes of this continent for the next generation. Another great work from the Brenthurst Foundation researchers, as the book does contribute to the discourse of political economy in Africa.



The God Who Made Mistakes: A page-turning tale that connects God's love with homosexuality and identity.

The book follows the lives of unhappily married couple Ayanda and Themba Hlatshwayo. Their tumultuous marriage gradually goes to the dogs as the book progresses. The cause of their woes is that the husband is a closeted gay man, or a cisgender male who prefers men. The wife, on the other hand, had agreed to enter into a marriage with a man that she barely knew, despite her mom's protestations.

Set in Alexandra township, Randburg and Kwa Mashu. The Jukskei River features prominently. Duker paints a vivid picture of post democratic South Africa.

The mothers in the book yield great influence, especially Differentia, Bongani's and Themba's Mom. Through the mom's, Duker demonstrates how mothers can make or break their children.

Duker writes queerness with clarity, empathy and understanding. The man on man sex scenes are romantic, sensual and not overdone. He does not flippantly write gayness as a new or youngster phenomenon. Some of his gay characters like Bra Zakes, went two generations back.

I could not help drawing parallels between Siya Khumalo's "You Got To Be Gay To Know God" wherein the authors assert that, if God is love, loves unconditionally, and His love never fails or falters, the same love extends to the LGBTQIA group. They too are his children. Unless, if He is "The God Who Made Mistakes"

There are equally interesting characters like Bra Zakes, Madala, Sipho Sibanda, Tinyiko, Putco, Samuels, Charles, Mr Do Santos, Kingsley, Hulisani and Philemon Xali. Through whom, themes of statutory rape, survival, homophobia, career, sibling rivalry, religion and marriage are explored.

I felt the characters of Charles and Kingsley could have been further developed. They played pivotal roles in the story. As a reader, I felt I barely knew them and that more could have been divulged on their background. Especially Kingsley, it was not clear what his motive was for sabotaging Themba at work.

A well-written and researched project by an engineer turned banker turned full-time author. **Other books by Duker are titled "Dying In New York", White Mahala, and "Yellow Bone".** This book highly recommended.

Written by [Puleng Hopper](#)

EW BLOG

In Book Reviews

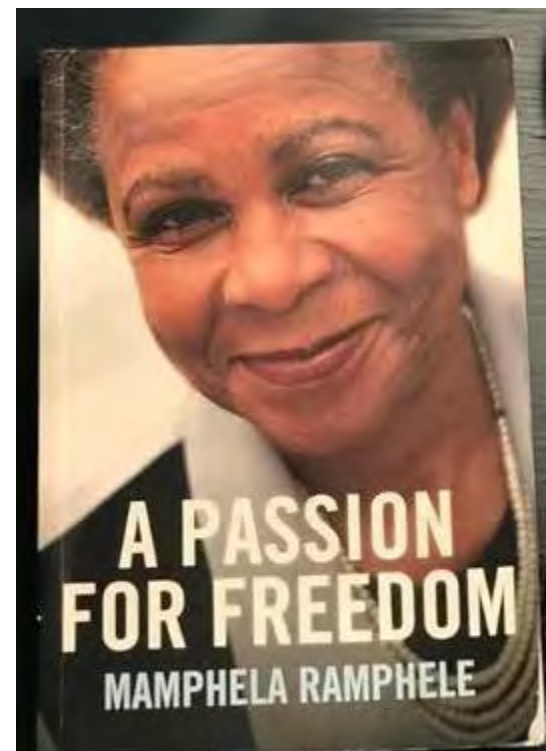
A Passion for Freedom: A tale of how medicine mixed well with politics

Written by [Regomoditswe Mputle](#)

Writing your own biography may be challenging in a number of ways. Firstly, it is difficult to document your entire life in just a few pages and secondly, you are effectively sharing your private life with many strangers, who might at some stage use it to discredit your reputation. However, it seems like Dr Mamphela Ramphele has shrugged off all those worries in her autobiography titled *A Passion for Freedom*.

The book is set in 35 chapters where she details important events and her life lessons. In a typical autobiographical set-up, the book starts with her childhood up until her current professional adult life.

What makes the book interesting is in the way she details how she got into activism and politics during the height of apartheid rule for someone who was meant to go to university to study medicine.



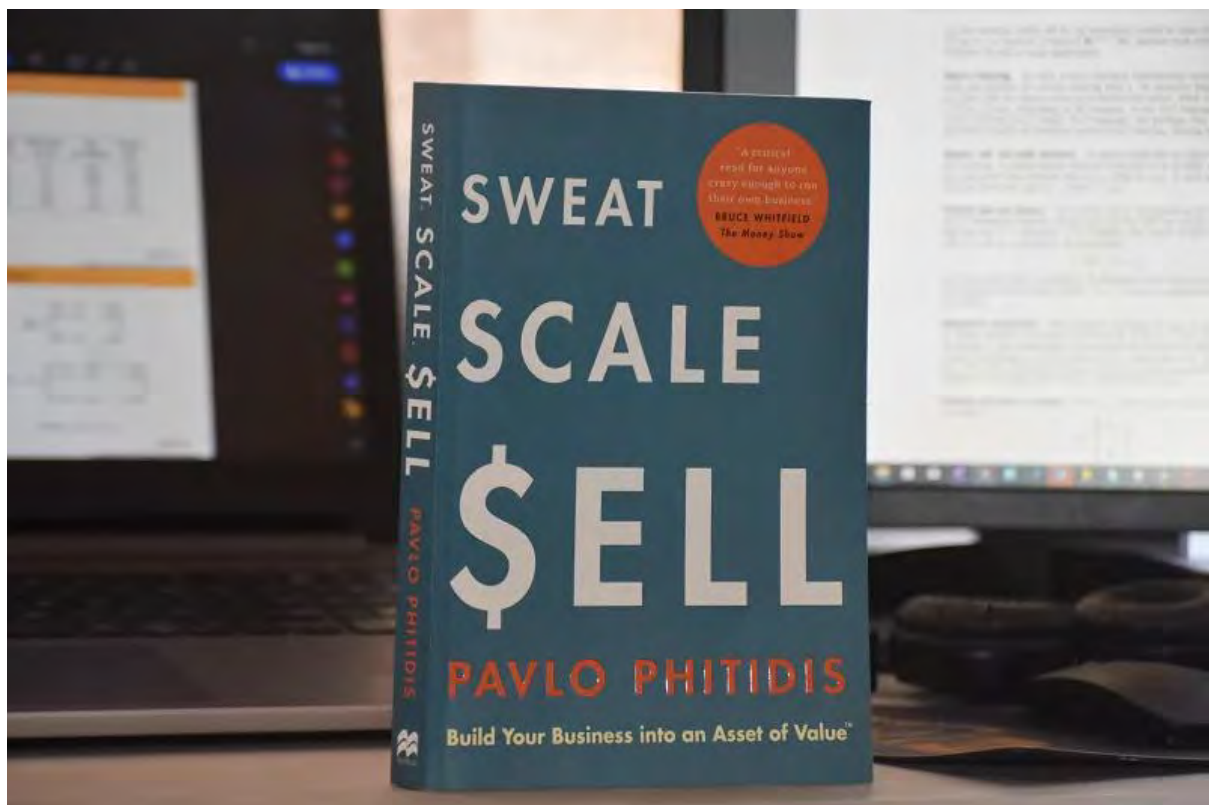
There are different themes in the book, however, the one that truly resonated with me is how the scribe teaches young black professional women to take pride in rocking their natural hair. Often times **when a black woman goes with their natural hair, they are seen as “untidy and unprofessional”**. However, Dr Ramphele shows in this book that she had the courage to throw away her wig and rock her natural hair even in the so-called “professional” space

Although the book is well-written, I found that there was no necessity to have so many chapters, as I believe that some of the chapters could have easily been merged.

Regardless of the positive message that comes with Dr Ramphele’s story, while reading this book, one also gets a sense that she is trying a little bit too much to show that her relationship with Steve Biko was more than that of colleagues as she always finds a way to include Biko in most of her conversations even when it is not needed.

Overall, this biography teaches one to always give their best shot at whatever they channel their energy on. Dr Ramphele is the epitome of a real go-getter.

Sweat, Scale, \$ell: A proper practical guide on how to get value for your money in business



It is every entrepreneur's hopes to see their business grow and become a success. However, in South Africa and across the globe, business owners, whether small, medium and big enterprise owners face challenges to sustain their business and at times are forced to sell their businesses for nothing.

In *Sweat Scale Sell*, Pavlo Phitidis provides step by step guidelines on how one can turn their business and make it an asset of value. He successfully does this through practical examples achieved using his business incubator company.

According to Pavlo, an asset of value is a business that has a solid system of delivery, run by a leader who directs it from the position where they have time to accelerate growth and can one day be sold for a good price and favorable terms.



Pavlo uses the consultations he had with his clients to bring in an understanding of how a business can be run successfully.

An example that truly resonated with me in the book about how one can fail to build a solid independent business was that of Clive. Clive **was one of Pavlo's clients, who was doing an excellent job in running his IT business with 89 employees.** With all this success, Clive did not make his business an asset of value. This is exposed when Clive could not sell his business in terms that are satisfying him

The book shows that the business owner should not be the one who goes up and down running everything in the business; instead they should have team leaders in every department who provides feedback to them.

The scribe provides a clear insight of how entrepreneurs can run their businesses from growth to growth. All the clients that Pavlo had to help to improve their business, they ended up having a smooth control of their businesses. This is because he assisted them to narrow down their responsibility in the process of running their business.

This is a must-read book, especially for small business owners who wish to grow their businesses. The book provides clarity that running a business is not as hard as it is sometimes perceived to be. The business just needs to be run from the position where the owner has time to accelerate growth.

If You Keep Digging: A proper diagnosis of South Africa's social ills, as faced by women



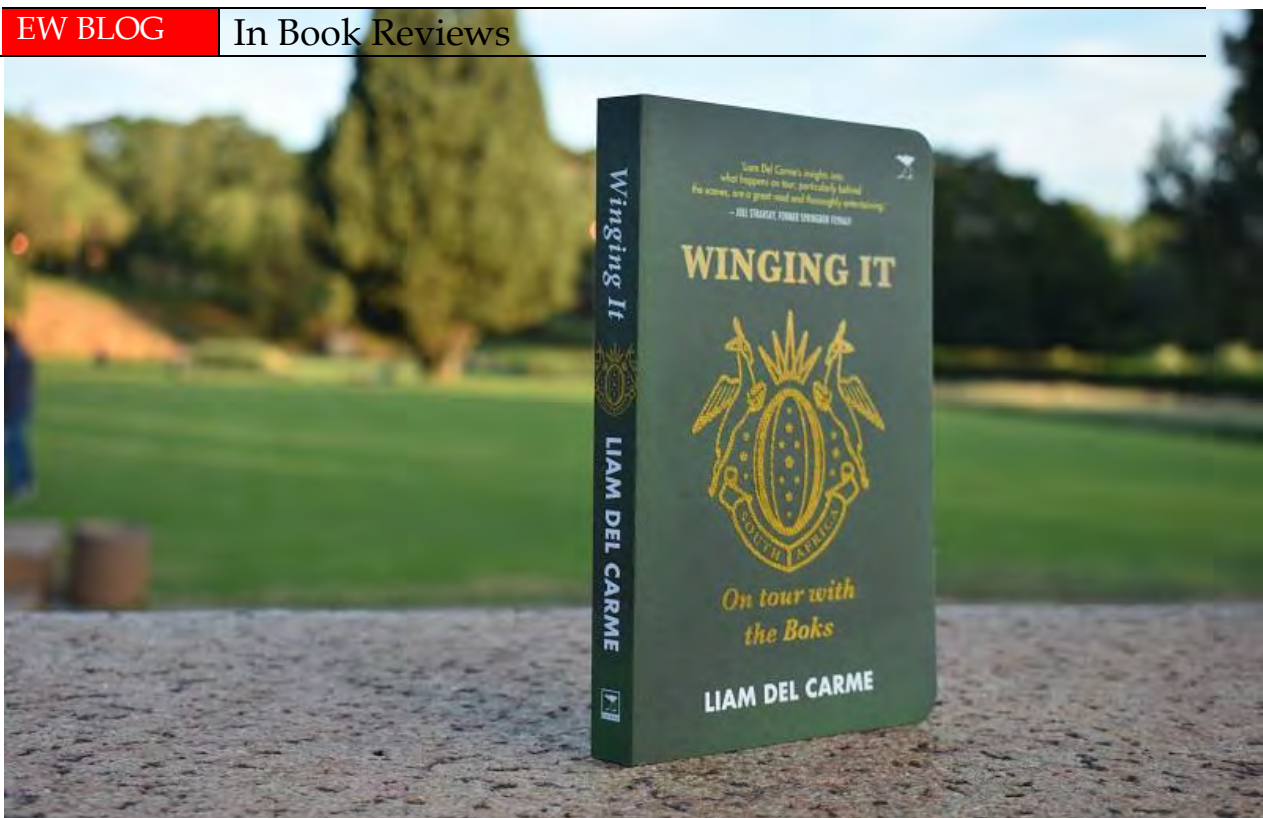
It is often said that the worst thing a human being can do is give in to temptations. Upon receiving this book, I was already in the middle of an interesting political book. I hardly put aside a book when I am yet to finish it. However, I need to admit that when I received this book, the title just made me break a pact I made a long time ago of not substituting a book for another. **Boy oh boy, it was worth it to have given in on my temptation.** Keletso Mopai's collection of short stories titled *If You Keep Digging*, not only made me break my pact of many years, but made me finish a 172-page book in less than 48 hours

This book is just unputdownable and it makes the reader ask for more, as I find myself pleading for the stories to continue upon finishing. In this book, Mopai narrates short stories that paint a vivid picture of South Africa's socio-political issues. From poverty, gender-based violence, rape, colourism, mental awareness, racism and other issues that continue to dominate South Africa's social ills.

The scribe's ability to bring up these issues in simplistic language makes this book an easy read, and very importantly, makes the reader see themselves in the characters who are carrying these different stories in this book. For example, I find myself resonating with the story of Lisakhanya and I know many black graduates who continue to be denied job opportunities, because of their skin colour and language will do too. Mopai's stories are easy to connect with because they form part of our (black South Africans) daily lives in the so-called new South Africa that is free from legislated apartheid but still chained by the effects of that draconian system.

The chapters are kept very short and that works well to keep the reader's attention intact throughout, hence it was so simple to finish the book within a couple of hours. I like how Mopai's kept a female's voice in almost all the stories throughout, because it is the majority of women, especially black women, who are at the receiving end of poverty, rape, violence and sexism in the new dispensation.

I can safely say that this is one book that successfully and truly narrates the daily struggles of many black women. The only bummer is that a reader will be left asking for more stories. However, besides that, this book is a positive contribution to South Africa's literature and one that will resonate with so many South Africans of all races. A must-read indeed, and I am so looking forward for Mopai's second offering. Her pen knows how to send one into temptation zone with no regrets.



Winging It: A Book That Illustrates The Wonderful Perks of Being a Sports Journalist

The cover of this book got my immediate attention even before I started perusing through the pages. The green passport cover sent me into a fabulous world where I pictured myself touring with the Springboks in top cities across the world. I must admit that the cover does justice to the content of the book. Publicide, who designed the cover deserves a mention for the great work they produced to complement Liam Del Carme's wonderful story.

Winging It- On tour with the Boks, has to be one book that many sports journalists in the country, most especially rugby scribes, have been waiting for quite some time. It is a book that **chronicles veteran sports journalist Liam Del Carme's many years of travelling with different Springboks teams on tour to different countries. From Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, England, Wales and Japan for their last Rugby World Cup.**

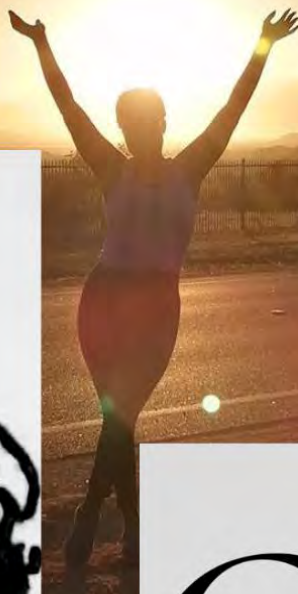
Del Carme narrates all his personal experiences travelling across the world reporting about the three-time Webb Ellis champions; the Springboks. Perusing through the pages of this book, the readers will be taken through all of the bad and **good of Liam's travelling. From** having to deal with subtle racism in Argentina to being treated like a king at many establishments in different parts of the country.

Liam is one of the few sportswriters who have had the privilege of covering almost all the World Cups the Springboks participated in since the country was readmitted back into the international game. I found myself slightly jealous with how this veteran journalist has reaped the rewards of being a sports journalist, and I know fellow scribes will feel the same after reading this book. Journalism is not really a glamorous profession and with sports departments treated mostly like stepchildren in many newsrooms in the country, it becomes so easier to envy the kind of privilege Liam has enjoyed in travelling across the world.

Winging It will make many envy Liam's job, but most importantly it will make you laugh, especially when Liam narrates the kind of relationship Eddie Jones and Peter De Villiers have had with the media. I like how the chapters have been separated through different themes and **also how short they are in keeping the reader's attention intact throughout.**

This is a must-read book and I will most definitely recommend it to parents who might have second thoughts when their children want to pursue journalism as a profession. While journalism is a passion-driven, not very good paying profession (speaking from experience), *Winging It* demonstrates that there are also great perks of being a journalist, especially a sports journalist.







Jackie Phamotse is a writer, businesswoman, social activist, and a creative mentor. Her debut novel *BARE: The Blesser's Game*, was published in 2017 and was awarded the African Icon Literary Award in Lagos, Nigeria in 2018. Her second book titled *I Tweet What I Like* was inspired by the late struggle icon Steve Biko, I write what I like. She followed that up with *BARE: The Cradle of The Hockey Club* in June 2019. Jackie's latest book is called *BARE III- Ego*. In this exclusive Q&A session with EW Blog Editor, Jackie talks about gender-based violence and receiving death threats over her writing about "society secrets".





Q&A with Jackie Phamotse

Author of BARE: The Blesser's Game, I Tweet What I Like, BARE: The Cradle of The Hockey Club, and BARE III- Ego

Jackie Phamotse Pours Her Heart Out on GBV and Receiving Death Threats Over her Writing on Society Secrets

Question:

BARE III- Ego is your latest book, did you ever thought that the BARE series will become this successful?

Answer:

To tell you the truth, BARE saved my life. When I was young I thought I was going to be in Advertising because one of my primary school friends wanted to be in the field, I didn't even know what Advertising was at the time. In high school I played netball and soccer, and my strongest academic work was in geography and English. I started writing when I was around 17, however I never believed I could be a professional writer or storyteller. When I came back to Gauteng, things were a little difficult. My mother was very sick and the abuse at home had increased. So I ran away from home after matric. I stayed in Braamfontein with a friend. My life changed for ever. I meet people that changed my life for the worst. Back then, in 2012, life was different. I saw things that no ordinary girl could see, the person I dated was a wealthy monster. He had it all, he was smart, and deceitful. But little did I know that, that abusive man that I wanted so badly was destroying me. After I left that relationship I continued writing. I left my small modelling career and went back to school. I completed my marketing and sales qualification and started to writing about Treasure's life. A character that was very close to my heart because she was my alter ego. Her life was just like mine. And so that how the BARE series began. From pain and struggle. I had lost everything and it gave me a sense of pride. I didn't think for one second it would be this big. I am so grateful that I could birth it.



Question:

Take us through the process of writing the first edition of **BARE- The Blesser's Game**, what triggered you to write the book which truly created contentious debates in the country?

Answer:

I was alone, living in someone's back room. I didn't have a clue what was next for my life. My childhood was the main course of my pain, so I started writing about it. Just to understand my own pain. It took two years to map out the manuscript. Bare the blesser's game was published in 2017.

Question:

With the two books, **BARE- The Blesser's Game** and, **BARE- Hockey Club**, what message(s) were you trying to convey to South Africans, especially to young vulnerable girls

Answer:

I wanted to just tell my story, however the undertone changed when I became honest with myself. South Africa has a painful history and we are still yet to witness that repercussions. Our parents have blocked us out from real family issues and in that the effects come out in our own lives. The increase of rape and domestic violence is evident in the men we encounter. I wanted people to know the truth about our generation, to see themselves in me. To also find their own voice and understand the world we live in.

Question:

Your second book, **I Tweet What I like**. The title is a bold and very directive. What made you to decide on that title?

I have followed out South African history for years and our struggle hero's. Steve Biko's story stood out for me. That's where the name comes from. We live in an era of social media and influencers. The book, that's a look at the laws and trends that govern social media. I question the policy's and the fair use of freedom of speech online. I look at reputation, human trafficking, advertising and dating sites etc. It's an all-round social media guide.

Question:

Your writing about “society secrets” seems to have rubbed the other people the wrong way, did you anticipate that they will be people who will not be happy with your work?

Answer:

Yes. My books don't shy away from the truth. There is no book series or book that's like BARE-The Blesser's Game and BARE- The Cradle of the Hockey Club in the market. I received a lot of death threats and I have countless starters. It's part of the game. Many people have tried to silence me for years. Others even went as far as taking me to court to make sure that I never publish in SA again. I believe I am doing the right thing, exposing the truth and creating awareness. Many people are scared to come out and report crimes because of these kind of things. So what can I do? I have to write, to ease the burden of being the forgotten generation. No one cares about women in this country. Every day men kill women and child in all kinds of communities. Rich or poor. No woman is immune. We all have to do our part in helping those who have lost their way. It is hard writing about these topics because there are a lot of powerful people that don't want anyone knowing about their bad dealings. The sex cults and the boys clubs. But history has to be told as we live it. We can't just sit and watch, someone has to stand up and fight. And in this case it's me. I have made peace with that.

Question:

Do you think that writers should have the autonomy to write whatever they like without fearing being sued?

Answer:

Yes. It's our constitutional right. Our writing forms part of public education and our countries legacy.

Question:

If you were to invite three celebrities to your book launch, who will it be and why them?

Answer:

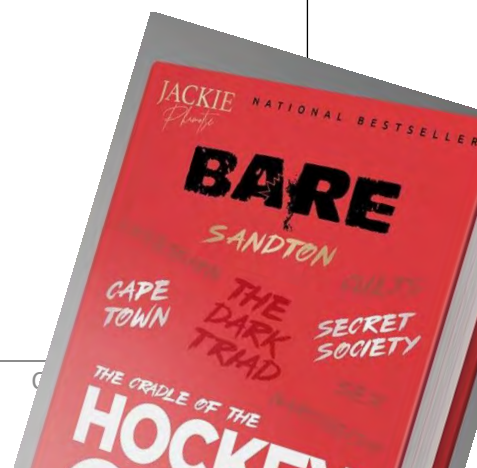
I would most certainly have my mentor, Mama Daphne Mashile Nkosi. She is the CEO of Kalagadi Manganese. She is bold, well-educated and is a leader in her own industry. The first woman in this continent to own and run a mine. Another person would be Michelle Obama. Her activism speaks for itself.

Question:

What or who inspired you to start writing?

Answer:

No one really. Writing is personal for me. It's my own outlet.



Question: As mentioned above that BARE III is your latest book, just give us a sneak peek of what is it about without giving much?

Answer:

People don't know the real names of the people in the secret society, so I shared som

Question:
Which book are you currently reading?

Answer:

I am currently studying with UNISA and my focus is around the criminal justice policies. So, the only books I am reading are from my criminology books

Question:
What role do you think the government should play in promoting a reading culture in SA?

Answer:

The government must create a budget and policies that protect literacy. No one in this country can become anything without books. Writers should be acknowledged and most importantly our books should be included in educational studies. When people learn about their own people, they find it easy to relate to educational material. We continue to learn about people that oppressed us, how is that still relevant in a democracy?



“Tragically, more 20 years since the end of official apartheid, access to education remain a challenge for many. Coupled with that, we continue to suffer from poor education despite massive public investment in the sector.”

Gaongalelwe Tiro

Author of *Parcel of Death*





Q & A

Gaongalelwe Tiro

Gaongalelwe Tiro describes himself as an avid reader, agnostic, stickler for social justice, and cosmology fanatic. In 2019, he released a debut book in honour of the great icon Onkgopotse Tiro titled, *Parcel of Death, the Biography of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro*. In this Q&A with EW Blog editor, Ezekiel Kekana, Gaongalelwe reflects on the legacy of a man who was not only his uncle but a beacon of hope for many young people during apartheid years, why he wrote *Parcel of Death*, and whether the democratic government has done enough in seeking justice for Tiro.

1. Question: I think for the benefit of our EW Blog readers, let us start with who is Gaongalelwe Tiro and how are you related to the great Onkgopotse Tiro?

Answer: Gaongalelwe Tiro is an ordinary South African, born and bred in Temba, Hammanskraal. He is a patriot, writer, journalist, communication practitioner, history student and single father of a beautiful daughter. Onkgopotse Tiro was my paternal uncle.

2. Question: Your debut book, *Parcel of Death* which is a biography of the late icon, Onkgopotse Tiro was released in 2019 under *Pan Macmillan*, how has the feedback been from the readers?

Answer: I have had a lot of feedback, which fortunately has been quite positive. I suppose that has something to do with the fact that very little was known about my subject and his role in the liberation struggle. Before *Parcel of Death* was written, anyone interested in reading about Onkgopotse Tiro would only find a potted history from various sources, some of which contained inaccuracies.

3. Question: What prompted you to go with the title, *Parcel of Death*?

Answer: It was something Professor Njabulo Ndebele wrote about the Onkgopotse Tiro assassination incident. For some reason, the phrase just jumped at me.

4. Question: Take us through the emotional journey of writing this book about a man who was brutally murdered by the apartheid regime?

Answer: The putting together of the book took just more than two years and involved considerable research from the archives, journals and books, and through interviews. I spent a lot of time in Dinokana, Zeerust, which is the village where my subject was born and bred, talking to family, his childhood friends, his peers and members of the community. The time I spent there helped me a lot in terms of helping me understand his early formative influences. The writing journey was only emotional in so far as it drove home the injustice of it all. I believe that with just a little bit of effort the killers of Onkgopotse Tiro could have brought to book. Instead, by letting apartheid assassins and mass murderers get away scot-free, we have cultivated a culture of impunity that is now manifesting itself in our national life in disturbing ways.

5. Question: In his foreword, former AZAPO leader, Mosibudi Mangena admitted that the biography of Tiro was 'long overdue'. Did you feel pressured that you as Tiro's relative should write his story?

Answer: No, I did not feel any pressure at all. In fact, I was initially ambivalent about writing the story though it is close to my heart. My sense, at the time, was that my proximity to him, as a blood relative, might create perceptions of partiality. I toyed with the idea for a very long time before finally deciding to put pen to paper. I'm happy that I did it, though I would have been equally happy if it someone else had done it.

6. Question: The current generation, the so-called ‘born frees’, majority of them aren’t familiar with the role played by the likes of Tiro in the fight against the white and racist apartheid rule, do you think before your book, there was enough and still is enough literature that celebrates the role Tiro played during the country’s dark days?

Answer: Mine is just about a contribution to keeping his memory and that of his generation of activists alive. Still, there are gaping holes in South African historiography that needs to be attended to and the issue isn’t just about Tiro. Much more needs to be done about what, in my view, is deliberate historical erasure. It appears to me that the contributions of individuals, generations and alternative, radical visions and dreams of freedom that also animated the struggle for social change have been airbrushed out of the popular narrative of the liberation struggle.

7. Question: Onkgopotse Tiro was a vocal critic of an unfair and unjust higher education system during apartheid. When you saw the 2015 #FeesMustFall student protest and the continuous commodification of education, are you disappointed that the challenges faced by the likes of Tiro in the education sector are still very much prevalent in the democratic dispensation?

Answer: He was passionate about the education of the African child and saw it as an important means of liberation. I share that passion. Tragically, more 20 years since the end of official apartheid, access to education remain a challenge for many. Coupled with that, we continue to suffer from poor education despite massive public investment in the sector.

8. Question: What is your message to young people who will want to know more about forgotten heroes such as Onkgopotse Tiro?

Answer: Read and research as much as possible. Some of the histories are recorded but not readily accessible unless one goes out and looks for them. But even more importantly speak to the elders as many are repositories of the oral history that is not in the history books.

9. Question: Many freedom fighters continue to be celebrated and honoured by the democratic government; do you think since the country’s democracy there has been more done by our government in honouring the memory of a man who has been described as the ‘godfather’ of the 1976 uprisings?

Answer: There have been several symbolic acts from different parties to honour his memory with two schools named after him – the Onkgopotse Tiro Primary School in Tshepisoong, Roodepoort, Onkgopotse Tiro Comprehensive School in Slurry, just outside Mafikeng. The latter school runs an annual memorial lecture and so does the University of the North, which has also named several amenities on its main campus in Polokwane after him. There are several streets named after him across the country. So, I will not complain much about that as many others who died in the struggle have not had the same honour. Meanwhile, you have a curious situation of every other public amenity being named from the same coterie of people. Oh, and you still have public amenities bearing the names of apartheid or colonial low-life scum. Go figure! Back to your question about whether the democratic has done enough to honour Onkgopotse Tiro. No! For me, naming monuments after him or posthumous awards and recognition will never substitute the imperative to deliver justice. The truth about what happened is the first and only prize that matters.

10. Question: If you had to invite three political figures to the grave of Onkgopotse Tiro, who will those be and why them?

Answer: Hmm... from the current crop, no one in particular. From among those already past, Muziwakhe Lembede, Mangaliso Sobukwe and Bantu Biko inspire me the most.

11. Question: Which book are you currently reading?

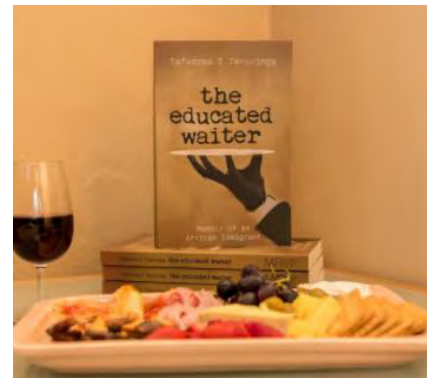
Answer: Jacob Dlamini’s Terrorist Album.



Tafadzwa Reflects on the Educated Waiter, Plight of African Immigrants and Progressive Leadership in Zimbabwe



Q&A with Tafadzwa Taruvinga



Tafadzwa Zimunhu Taruvinga released his debut memoir titled, *The Educated Waiter* in 2019. Tafadzwa has a knack for literary, popular, and scholarly writing. He is also a corporate trainer with solid experience sharpened from delivering accredited courses within 50+ private and public sector organisations on the African continent. In this exclusive interview with *EW Blog* editor, Ezekiel Kekana, Tafadzwa reflects on his debut memoir, the plight of African immigrants in South Africa and he also shares good advice to young foreign African students studying in the country.

“We now live in a time when it’s no longer so important which country you come from as it is what social impact you impress upon the world” -
Tafadzwa Zimunhu Taruvinga

Question: First, congratulations on your debut book, *The Educated Waiter*, how has the reception been for the book from both South African and Zimbabwean readers?

Answer: Thank you, Ezekiel and the *EW Blog* team, for creating this amazing opportunity through which I can talk about *The Educated Waiter*. The reception in South Africa, Zimbabwe and within the global African diaspora community has been really great. Many people can relate to my story because, in one way or another, it’s their story too. Some who have read the book say: “I laughed and cried hard as I was reading your story.”

Question: What inspired or motivated you to write down this book?

Answer: I have a passion for both writing and education. I believe they are both powerful gateways to self-empowerment and social justice. I felt that living through the struggles and successes that I have, but without sharing them with the world, would have been an injustice to the voiceless migrants and students whose personal journeys resonate with mine. That’s why I wrote this book.

Question: The title of the book, *The Educated Waiter*, why did you decide to go with that title?

Answer: This question always reminds me of my mother. When I came up with the title in 2017, I predicted that it would highlight the plight of, in the literal sense, African migrant waiters toiling for a pittance in South Africa's hospitality industry, just to scrape a living. On the evening of my book launch in October 2019, my mother shared with me her unforgettable interpretation. She said the title was apt because I had spent a longer time than usual trying to graduate, as well as to become a published writer. I had "waited", despite being "educated", to see my dreams come to life. I think her summation is very powerful.

Question: In the book, you touched on the challenges of being a foreign student in South Africa. While many students would easily drop out, what motivated you to finish your degree despite your challenges at Rhodes University?

Answer: I told myself that I had no choice but to graduate at Rhodes University. The other option was to pack my "China bag" and return home to Zimbabwe where I might have vegetated on my mother's sofa that she bought from her sweat-in-labour 1995 salary. I would have felt like a failure if I did that. After all, I had bussed in over a distance of 2100km between Harare and Grahamstown. Because I had gone that far, I had to keep going.

Question: With the book, what message (s) were you trying to convey to both South Africans and Zimbabweans?

Answer: We now live in a time when it's no longer so important which country you come from as it is what social impact you impress upon the world. Will you be remembered as a red-hot bull branding iron that inflicts pain, or as a coal iron that warms and straightens up the social fabric of the world? No one else is going to come and fix our problems in Africa, and the best place for us to start is with unity rather than the "otherisation" of others. Every young African needs to urgently internalise this way of thinking.

Question: Afrophobia, unemployment, and racism are some of the themes in the book, what do you think make so many South Africans to be angry at their fellow African brothers and sisters?

Answer: It's wrong to say that all South Africans are angry with Africans from other parts of the continent. I have lived with South Africans for over six years of my life and that is testimony to their benevolence. However, xenophobia, racism and other forms of prejudice are global maladies that we will confront for some time to come. It's our duty as young people to become even more vocal and active about them. That way, our children may have a better future than ours.

Question: You are among many Zimbabweans who find themselves in South Africa due to the poor economic challenges in the country of your birth. How does it make you feel that even under the so-called new leadership things remains the same in Zimbabwe?

Answer: Without a doubt, the economic challenges in Zimbabwe are one of the push factors leading to the emigration of many people to other parts of the world, including South Africa. I feel optimistic for Zimbabwe because its people have shown extraordinary resilience through countless trying times. It's my hope that it won't take long to rebuild the country when the time has come for its respite.

Question: Zimbabwe is currently under turmoil, with human rights once again being trampled by the government and journalists being arrested for exposing corruption in the government, what message do you have for your fellow citizens who are continuously being terrorised by their government?

Answer: I'm not sure whether Zimbabwean citizens are being terrorised by their government – I would need to research this in order to become better informed. Having said that, I believe Zimbabwe desperately needs a progressive way of thinking in order to come out of the doldrums: transformational leadership combined with civil participation.

Question: If you had to invite three African authors for a dinner at 'the place where people eat and fart a little', who will that be?

Answer: I wouldn't invite anyone to The Place Where People Eat and Even Fart a Little because that would empower and incentivise Caesar the oppressor and, frankly, I have moved on from that dark period of my life. I would take them elsewhere for dinner, where I would have kept quiet and listened to them speaking: Professor Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and James Baldwin.

Question: Should your readers expect a second book soon?

Answer: Yes, I'm writing my next book and I will most likely publish it by 2022.

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: At the moment, I'm reading Dr Jakkie Cilliers' Africa First: Igniting a Growth Revolution. He shares great insights on what Africa might become by 2063 through new reforms in agriculture, education manufacturing and governance, et cetera.

Question: Your message to all foreign African students studying in South Africa?

Answer:

Your journey will be absolutely tumultuous, but strife should never overpower your desire to succeed against all odds. Don't sweat the discomforts, dredge in and focus on your dream.



Tafadzwa Zimunhu Taruvinga



Esinako Ndabeni

“Kwaito was incredibly symbolic for me as a post-apartheid sound” – Esinako Ndabeni

Esinako Ndabeni was born in 1997 in Mthatha, Eastern Cape. She founded a blog called ‘Don’t Call Me Kaffir.’ Her love for Kwaito music saw her and Sihle Mthembu co-writing a book called *Born to Kwaito* in 2018. In this exclusive interview with EW Blog editor, Ezekiel Kekana, Esinako opens about her love for Kwaito music, her favourite Kwaito album of all-time and why women should be allowed to live their lives without being policed by society.

Question: Take us through the first time you heard Kwaito music, what went through your head?

Answer: I can’t know. I was young. It’s one of those things I was just born into as someone who was born in 1997. I remember it as one of the lighter parts of my childhood; doing iguqa ngamadolo to Mzekezeke, the fun conspiracies about who Mzekezeke is... When I listened to it again in my young adulthood, I was transported to that time. And I loved the bass. I do not enjoy house music in its original form or its other experimentations. Kwaito is that beautiful bridge. It’s slower.

Question: With all different music genres in the country, what specifically made you fall in love with Kwaito?

Answer: I love music in all its forms. Just two days ago, I was getting down to the Lusanda Gospel Choir. The week before, Shwi no Mtekhala. I think, as a writer, I am drawn to writing and thinking about certain South African music forms more deeply because, well, I am South African. So I gravitate towards those music corners that aren’t as explored as I would like them to be. Kwaito was incredibly symbolic for me as a post-apartheid sound and felt like a great starting point. The unbridled creativity of just fusing different types of music and expressions together to create something that is that fresh. To make a soulful kind of electronic beat... That’s cool to me. Plus, the bass

Question: You co-authored your debut book, *Born to Kwaito*, what inspired you and Sihle Mthembu to finally put a book together about Kwaito?

Answer: Both Sihle and I shared a love for Kwaito music and we just thought it would be a cool idea to have a book that documents our relationship with kwaito and reflects on the genre’s importance.

Question: In the book, you mention how former President Thabo Mbeki referred to Kwaito as a ‘distraction from real issues’, how would you describe Kwaito?

Answer: Truly, I wouldn’t. I have no idea how to describe kwaito music. Because it’s also not just music, right? It’s a subculture. And it means different things to different people now. The South African Music Awards have a “Best Kwaito/Gqom/Amapiano” category now. It seems rather elusive to me now. When I try to explain it to people from foreign countries who have never heard of it, the words that I use a lot are “bubblegum, house music, slower BPM”, “bass”, “township”, “post-apartheid sound”

Question: A lot of Kwaito artists were/are always at the wrong side of the law, either accused of violence against women and rape, do you think that reinforces the idea that Kwaito is music for amavuilpop?

Answer: A lot of kwaito artists aren't, though. I think this question renders a lot of women who made and participated in kwaito invisible. Violent men exist in every part of society; there are just certain people who are read as more violent than others because of what they represent. The idea that dressing and expressing yourself in a certain way, representative or reminiscent of a certain place, makes you more subject to scrutiny and labeling is part of a long legacy of the othering of black men.

Question: Let's talk about women in Kwaito, do you think the likes of Lebo Mathosa, Brenda Fassie and Thembi Seete changed how society viewed the genre?

Answer: Women in kwaito, particularly Lebo Mathosa and Thembi Seete were right there in the advent of kwaito music. They did not arrive one day to change perceptions. They did not sanitise the genre. And they too faced criticisms of their own.

Question: If you had to invite five Kwaito stars to perform at your birthday party, who would that be and why them?

Answer: Mshoza, Boom Shaka, TKZee, Joe Nina to perform Ding Dong and Ding Dong alone, and Thebe.

Question: Should your readers expect a second book from you soon?

Answer: Haha. No.

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: "Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out" by Aph Ko. I am fascinated with the idea of black veganism right now. Aph Ko writes about understanding that white supremacy has placed any being who is not a white man lower than him on the hierarchy of being. She encourages us to think about animal commodification (therefore violence) and consumption as part of the white supremacist capitalist system that oppresses black people (and often animalises us too).

Question: One of the most contentious and never-ending debates is whether Kwaito is dead or not. Do you think Kwaito, as a music genre, will ever die?

Answer: We could be the people who kill the debate by not participating in it! I think there are more interesting questions to be asked: what's the infrastructure that makes it difficult for so many South African subcultures and their originators and creators to thrive for a long time? What do these different short cycles in South African popular music tell us? Are we doing enough to preserve black cultural legacies? To honour the people who participate in them? Are artists well equipped financially to grow in sound and genre

Question: Which is your favourite Kwaito album of all-time?

Answer: "Halloween" by TKZee. A very obvious answer but I just never get tired of it. It's one of those albums that are lovely beyond the time within which they were made. It's nostalgic but it's also right here. Timeless

Question: What message do you have for people who seem to have a problem with how the likes of Zodwa WaBantu break societal normalities?

Answer: I think as long as someone is not doing something that harms other people, we do not have the right to prescribe to them how they should be. In "Born to Kwaito", I spend some time discussing that I believe that women are free to express themselves how they please with their bodies. In fact, that's often a kind of resistance.



Desiree-Anne Martin

“Feminism for me is about owning my innate power”- Desiree-Anne Martin

Desiree-Anne Martin is an author, poet, general word junkie and addictions counsellor. Desiree-Anne’s story, *Delirium* recently won first prize for the Arts24/Kwela Books short stories entry. The Cape Town-born author also released her searing and brutally honest memoir titled, *We Don’t Talk About It, Ever*, two years back. In this Q&A with EW Blog editor, Desiree-Anne talks about what inspired her winning short story, *Delirium*, writing *We Don’t Talk About It, Ever*, and what feminism is to her. Desiree-Anne also has some good advice for drug addicts.

Question: First, congratulations on winning first prize in the Arts24/Kwela Books, are you excited that your work is appreciated across board, even by fellow writers?

Answer: Thank you so much. I was thrilled beyond belief to have had my story chosen as the winning entry and when I saw who the luminous, literary judging panel was comprised of, I was even more ecstatic. I met the inimitable Fred Khumalo at the Midlands Literary Festival last year and said to him that one day I would get him to read my work, one way or the other, and it finally came to pass!

Question: Take us through what inspired the short story, *Delirium*?

Answer: I work as an addictions and general counsellor in Cape Town and when a State of Natural Disaster was declared, I was frustrated that not enough forethought had been given to the addicted populations of this country and how it would impact them. Alcohol withdrawal and the dangers thereof was forefront of my mind when I conjured up young Mia. Her story is one of frequency on the Cape Flats – and elsewhere – and I wanted to convey the hardships of dealing with alcoholism within the family during lockdown.

Question: What message (s) were you trying to convey with this story?

Answer: I wanted to communicate how the family system is delivered a powerful blow when there is an addict or alcoholic within that system. I wanted to convey that addiction affects and causes deep rot within that system and leaves no one untouched

Question: Let us talk about your debut memoir, *We Don't Talk About It, Ever*, what made you go with that title?

Answer: My publisher at the time actually convinced me to go with it. I wanted another title but she was adamant that it was “too Mills and Boons”-esque! But I am glad that I went with *We Don't Talk About It, Ever*. It boldly encapsulates the lies, secrets and hidden truths that pervade individuals, families, communities, cultures. We are taught that it is not okay to speak our truth, to ask for help, to break the silence on so many important issues. That was the case in my lived experience. I held onto every last secret; and it kept me severely sick.

Question: Many reviewers applauded you for your bravery in writing your story so honestly and raw, were you not worried about how the people will receive the book, especially those who formed part of your life during your drug addiction period?

Answer: Thank you. I'm not sure if it was an act of bravery or foolishness! But I did receive remarkable feedback from complete strangers telling me about how my truth resonated with them. I started becoming fearful of emotional reprisal the closer my publication date came but, apart from a few irate family members who didn't even read the book but felt they were somehow misrepresented, there was no backlash. I actually found masses of support from people who knew me during my active addiction. They were, “Tell it. This is our story too.”

Question: South Africa is one country where many young people consume dangerous substances such as drugs and alcohol, do you think there has been enough literature to educate young people about the dangers of drugs and alcohol?

Answer: This is a hot, controversial topic for me. Personally, I don't think it is about the lack of literature or the absence of anti-drug campaigns (although there are some amazing organisations doing exceptional work in this arena) but rather about addressing the symptomatic and systemic problems when it comes to drug use amongst adolescence. Teens, it has been noted, use drugs to experiment, to fit in and to change how they feel. No amount of brochures is going to make a dent in the need to escape.

Question: You also touched on sexual violence you endured in your childhood, do you think the government has done enough in terms of curbing the spread of rape and gender-based violence directed to women and children in SA?

Answer: Once again – and with the utmost respect to the NPO's, NGO's and other organisations tackling these issues head-on – I think the government has its hands tied. Real change happens at the ground level; within the family system, teaching boys how to become men and treat women with respect and dignity, and teaching women to value themselves and acknowledge their own worth.

Question: With your stories getting good attraction across, is there any plan to put together a second book?

Answer: It is in its infancy; in the brewing and percolating stages but, yes, there is another book on the horizon.

Question: As a feminist, you endure lots of insults from different people, especially those who do not appreciate your fight against gender inequality, what does feminism mean to you?

Answer: I was recently blessed to have had an essay published in the anthology, *Living While Feminist*, curated by Jen Thorpe. It is entitled, *No one Tells You*, and in it I write about how no one informs you about the intricacies and nuances of navigating this world as a woman, let alone being a fiery feminist. I was clueless; I thought feminism was just another secret society that I didn't belong to. I am not a subscriber to the #allmenaretrash train of thought but I do know feminism for me is about owning my innate power, empowering myself and my fellow women at every turn and living my authentic truth. I have two young daughters and I want them to inherit the legacy that they are "strong, proud, Black women". In order to do that, I need to live that legacy

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: I am actually reading the biography of Zelda Fitzgerald by Nancy Milford. I love reading memoir and biography with a purple passion!

Question: What is your message to people who are battling addiction, be it drug, food, and sex addiction?

Answer: That there is hope, always.

Question: If you were to co-write a book with any South African author about feminism, drug addiction and gender equality, who will that author be?

Answer: What an insanely difficult question! I would jump on the bookish bandwagons of Sue Nyathi, Mohale Mashigo and Kelly-Eve Koopman.!

Your message to people who are battling addiction, be it drug, food, and sex addiction?

Answer: That there is hope, always.

Desiree-Anne Martin



NR Brodie Reflects on *Three Bodies* and Another Reshma Patel and Ian Jack's Thriller



Dr Nechama Brodie has worked as a journalist, editor, and publisher for over two decades. NR Brodie as she is affectionally known for her fiction works has published nine books thus far. Her latest book titled *Three Bodies* was published by Pan MacMillan in 2020 and continues to be warmly received across South Africa. In this exclusive interview with EW Blog editor, Dr

Brodie talks about writing *Three Bodies*, which is a sequel to her previous novel, *Knucklebone*, violent crimes in South Africa and she also has a good advice to young aspiring authors.

Question:

For our EW Blog readers, can you kindly tell us who is Dr NR Brodie and how many books have you written thus far?

Answer:

My name is Nechama Brodie. NR Brodie is the name I use for my fiction works – I have published nine books so far, mostly non-fiction. My non-fiction work includes urban histories, memoirs (written together with well-known public figures), and a new book about femicide in South Africa, which is based on the research I did for my PhD.

Question:

Your latest novel, *Three Bodies* published by Pan MacMillan, what made you to go for this title?

Answer:

The story revolves around the seemingly unrelated discoveries of three dead women, in or near different bodies of water: at the Hartbeespoort Dam, the Jukskei River, and the Vaal River. I chose the title because it conveys a sense of threat or violence, and also links back to the storyline.

Question: *Three Bodies* is a sequel to your previous novel, *Knucklebone*, was it also in your plans to continue with the story of Reshma Patel and Ian Jack?

Answer:

When *Knucklebone* was published (in 2018) I already had the idea for *Three Bodies* – a story that started with a dead woman being found in the Hartbeespoort Dam. *Knucklebone* had a really positive reception from readers, and so my publishers decided they were interested in a second book in the series.

Question: Femicide, traditional beliefs, superstitions, white privilege, apartheid injustices are some of the themes in *Three Bodies*, what inspired you to write this book which tackles South Africa's many social ills at once?

Answer:

I research violent crime in my professional and academic work. And, as a journalist and history writer, the injustices and violence of the past always intrude into the present. The past casts a very long shadow. You cannot really write a South African story without acknowledging these aspects. In terms of writing a story that includes traditional beliefs, I have always been interested in books that have a hint of the supernatural. I think it is important to have local stories that include local 'magic' and power – not just European elves and dragons and pixies etc. We have a strong, and important tradition of belief and practice in South Africa, and one that continues to this day. When I wrote *Knucklebone*, the story involves a fight against an international animal poaching syndicate. The main characters, Ian Jack and Reshma Patel, are helped by a sangoma, MaRejoice, who is equally opposed to the wholesale plunder of South Africa's natural resources.

Question: Writing a sequel might be challenging exercise, as readers expect characters to evolve more than anything else, would you say that both the lead characters, Reshma and Ian's characters have grown and shown the reader their other side in *Three Bodies*?

Answer:

I think in *Three Bodies* we see a lot more of Reshma, and also see Reshma involved in some excellent action scenes, which show off her ability as a police officer. I think in this book they each grapple, more, with the complexity of their roles in seeking justice, and which rules they are and are not willing to break or bend. I tend to focus more on these aspects than, say, their (romantic) relationship.

Question: Some reviewers have criticised you for having not dug deeper enough on Ian's reluctance to confront the legacy of apartheid, do you think Ian, like other white South Africans has a difficult in admitting the injustices of the past and even his family's involvement in that?

Answer:

Yes – in fact, this is the point of Ian's conundrum: he knows and wants to confront this past, be the good guy (or the better guy?) It's challenging for him because sometimes he also sees himself in that same violence, which is why he stopped being a police officer in the first place. I do think, though, that Ian is actively seeking to be informed, not just in denial. Which is distinct from what I see many white South Africans do, which is exist permanently in denial.

Question: You are known for your work on femicide, do you think that the government has done enough to curb the killing of women and children in South Africa?

Answer:

I think that the government's failure to curb femicide is, in one part, a bigger failure to curb violent crime overall. We live with rates of extreme violence that no society should have to find acceptable. We cannot address gender-based violence and femicide, without addressing the bigger violence problem. Within that, the gap between what our laws say, and how our justice and police system actually operates, is also unacceptable. We need our police services to be better-resourced, and then better trained to properly investigate and even prevent gender-based violence. We need safer infrastructures in communities, so women are not made more vulnerable. There are many ways the State could make essential and simple changes that would have significant positive outcomes. But these tend to get delayed by bureaucracy, lack of will, etc.

Question: If you were to co-author a book which focuses on femicide and gender-based violence, who would you like to co-author that book with and why that person?

Answer:

I have just written a book on femicide, and I think it is the book I would have wanted to write – because I approach the topic from a specific angle. And I refer to hundreds of other papers and research contributions made by others in the field, but who have not looked at the issue in the specific way that I have. I think if I co-authored a book on violence, it would be on a different topic other than femicide or GBV.

Question: With *Three Bodies*, what message (s) did you want to convey to the readers and South Africans at large?

Answer:

That the bad guys will get what's coming to them in the end. The violent ones, the ones who thought they got away with it, the ones who never got punished. That justice will find them.

Question: Should readers expect yet another book on Reshma Patel and Ian Jack in the future or that was the end of their journey in *Three Bodies*?

Answer:

There is another story in the works, but it really depends on how the book market responds to *Three Bodies*, and how the book market survives the pandemic!

Question:

Which book are you currently reading?

Answer:

I just finished reading *The Mercies* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave – I got an advance copy from my publisher, and it was a powerful and very immersive story. I have not read much since lockdown to be honest.

Question:

What is your message to young people who want to venture into writing as a full-time profession?

Answer:

To have a day job that pays your bills (writing rarely pays well, at least at the start) and also gives you life experience. Interacting with the world is where you will get your stories from, and how you will be able to make your stories come alive and feel real. Every interaction I have, informs my writing process. Working as a journalist taught me to pay attention to the details around me, and that has helped tremendously with my writing and my research.



Madam Afrika Shares her Love for Afrika in Vagabond

Lerato Mogoatlhe is a content strategist, writer, professional traveller. She released her travel memoir titled *Vagabond-Wandering Through Africa on Faith* published by BlackBird Books in 2019. In this exclusive Q&A with EW Blog editor, Madam Afrika touches on her travelling experiences in the African continent, shares her views on the afrophobic attitude of South Africans towards their fellow Africans and why she loves this continent.

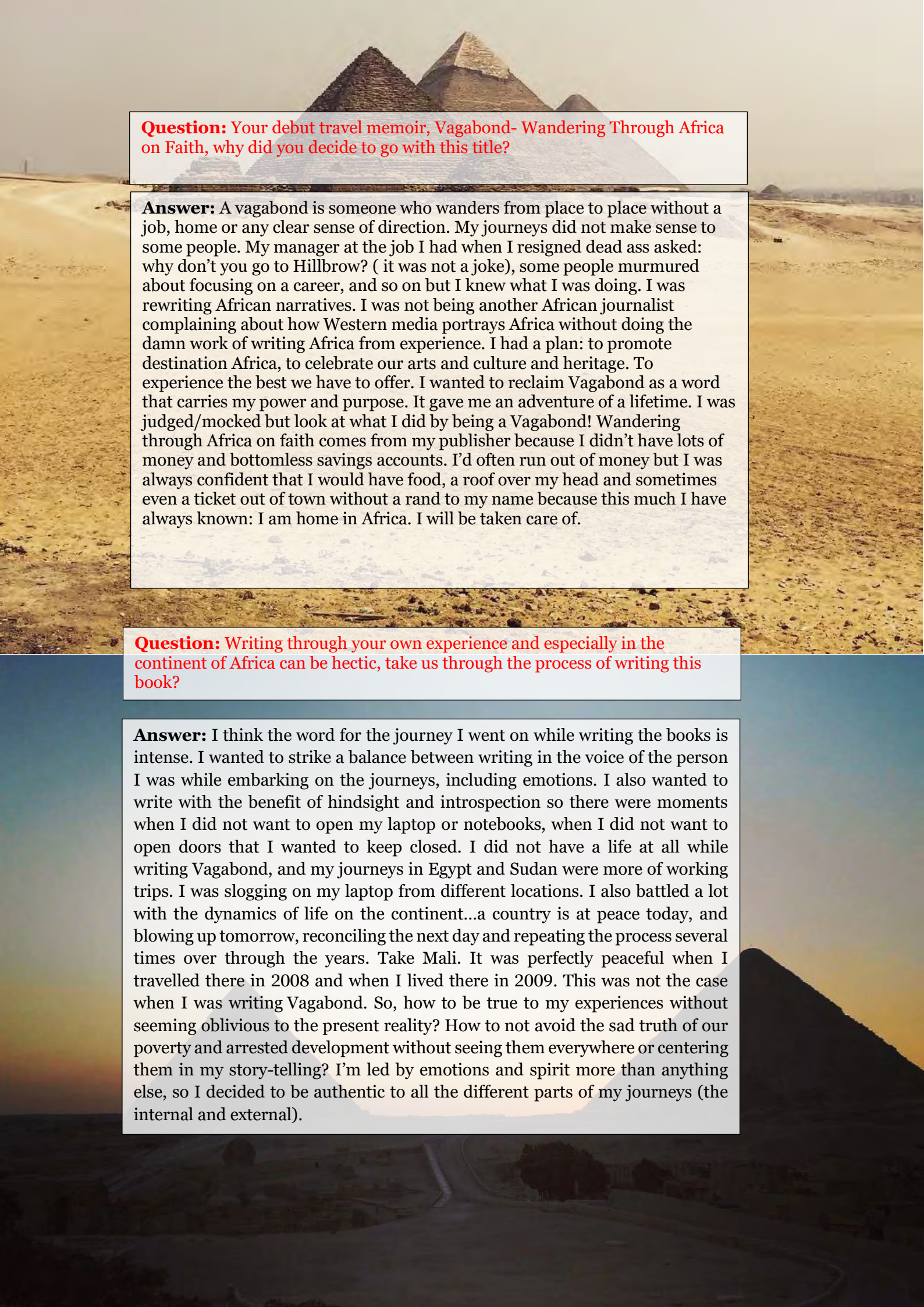


Question: You were an entertainment journalist travelling across the world and the continent, what made you finally put a book together about your travelling experiences in the continent of Africa?

Answer: I was an entertainment journalist for a very short while and have not been one since 2008 (THANK GOD. What a thankless, joyless, and exhausting life of zooming from event to event). I was always going to write a book, it just ended up taking a bit longer than I expected it would. Toni Morrison said write the book you want to read. I wanted to read a travel memoir that's set in Africa and delivers more than adventure and ticking off a bucket list. I wanted to write Africa for what it is, you know my home. So, an experience that is intimate, involves all the senses and brings along the heart and soul.

Question: As a journalist, you spend too much time writing stories about other people and events, how did you find the process of writing about yourself in your debut book?

Answer: I used to have a back-page column in the City Press, and often referenced my life, including sex life so writing about my life was easy. What I did find incredibly hard was revealing my lowest moments and vulnerabilities. Talking about the incident in Abidjan when my fling removed the condom was hard because I could not share the story without showing you my fears and maybe even how I relate to myself. Some people have said I need to be gentle on myself, for example. After reading that part, my now fiancée asked if I didn't want to step back and engage with the incident for what it was, a violation. Yet it is such a pivotal moment in my life as well, and I wanted it to read as it played out in 2008. This is easy to talk about even though it was hard to write. The absolute worst for me was writing about Rwanda because I had to mention everything: my internal struggles, my shame, my fears, my demons, my addiction. It felt like opening a can of worms, and it remains a very difficult space for me to be in, mentally and otherwise.



Question: Your debut travel memoir, *Vagabond- Wandering Through Africa on Faith*, why did you decide to go with this title?

Answer: A vagabond is someone who wanders from place to place without a job, home or any clear sense of direction. My journeys did not make sense to some people. My manager at the job I had when I resigned dead ass asked: why don't you go to Hillbrow? (it was not a joke), some people murmured about focusing on a career, and so on but I knew what I was doing. I was rewriting African narratives. I was not being another African journalist complaining about how Western media portrays Africa without doing the damn work of writing Africa from experience. I had a plan: to promote destination Africa, to celebrate our arts and culture and heritage. To experience the best we have to offer. I wanted to reclaim Vagabond as a word that carries my power and purpose. It gave me an adventure of a lifetime. I was judged/mockd but look at what I did by being a Vagabond! Wandering through Africa on faith comes from my publisher because I didn't have lots of money and bottomless savings accounts. I'd often run out of money but I was always confident that I would have food, a roof over my head and sometimes even a ticket out of town without a rand to my name because this much I have always known: I am home in Africa. I will be taken care of.

Question: Writing through your own experience and especially in the continent of Africa can be hectic, take us through the process of writing this book?

Answer: I think the word for the journey I went on while writing the books is intense. I wanted to strike a balance between writing in the voice of the person I was while embarking on the journeys, including emotions. I also wanted to write with the benefit of hindsight and introspection so there were moments when I did not want to open my laptop or notebooks, when I did not want to open doors that I wanted to keep closed. I did not have a life at all while writing *Vagabond*, and my journeys in Egypt and Sudan were more of working trips. I was slogging on my laptop from different locations. I also battled a lot with the dynamics of life on the continent...a country is at peace today, and blowing up tomorrow, reconciling the next day and repeating the process several times over through the years. Take Mali. It was perfectly peaceful when I travelled there in 2008 and when I lived there in 2009. This was not the case when I was writing *Vagabond*. So, how to be true to my experiences without seeming oblivious to the present reality? How to not avoid the sad truth of our poverty and arrested development without seeing them everywhere or centering them in my story-telling? I'm led by emotions and spirit more than anything else, so I decided to be authentic to all the different parts of my journeys (the internal and external).

Question: What message(s) were you trying to convey about the African continent with your own personal experience to fellow Africans and the world?

Answer: To Africans: travel your land, consume your art and culture, celebrate your icons, own your heritage and be unapologetically loud and proud of it. Seek the history they still refuse to teach us in schools and that they still don't show us in the mainstream media. But you have to do this for yourself. You have to ask yourself why it's more important for you to know Paris than, say Cairo or why your consumption of African art and culture is limited to your country's pop culture. This continent is home. It's complicated and complex but damned, it is home and a great one at that. To the world, and parts of the diaspora that perpetuate stereotypes or come here to the dynamics of their dysfunctional Western society: cut out that bullshit this very instant.

Question: The African continent continues to be the most poverty-stricken continent in the world and has been labelled as a "dark continent", from your travelling experience across the five regions, what are the things you think we should be proud of as Africans?

Answer: Our humanity. We see people here. We hold each other with love and tenderness. We are the embodiment of love, patience, and grace. Africa is rich in every way. We, the people, are the greatest treasure. Our ancient history and heritage. Our natural beauty. Our art and culture, including creativity, music, food and fashion and our youth (passionate, driven, changemakers, innovators, social justice warriors).

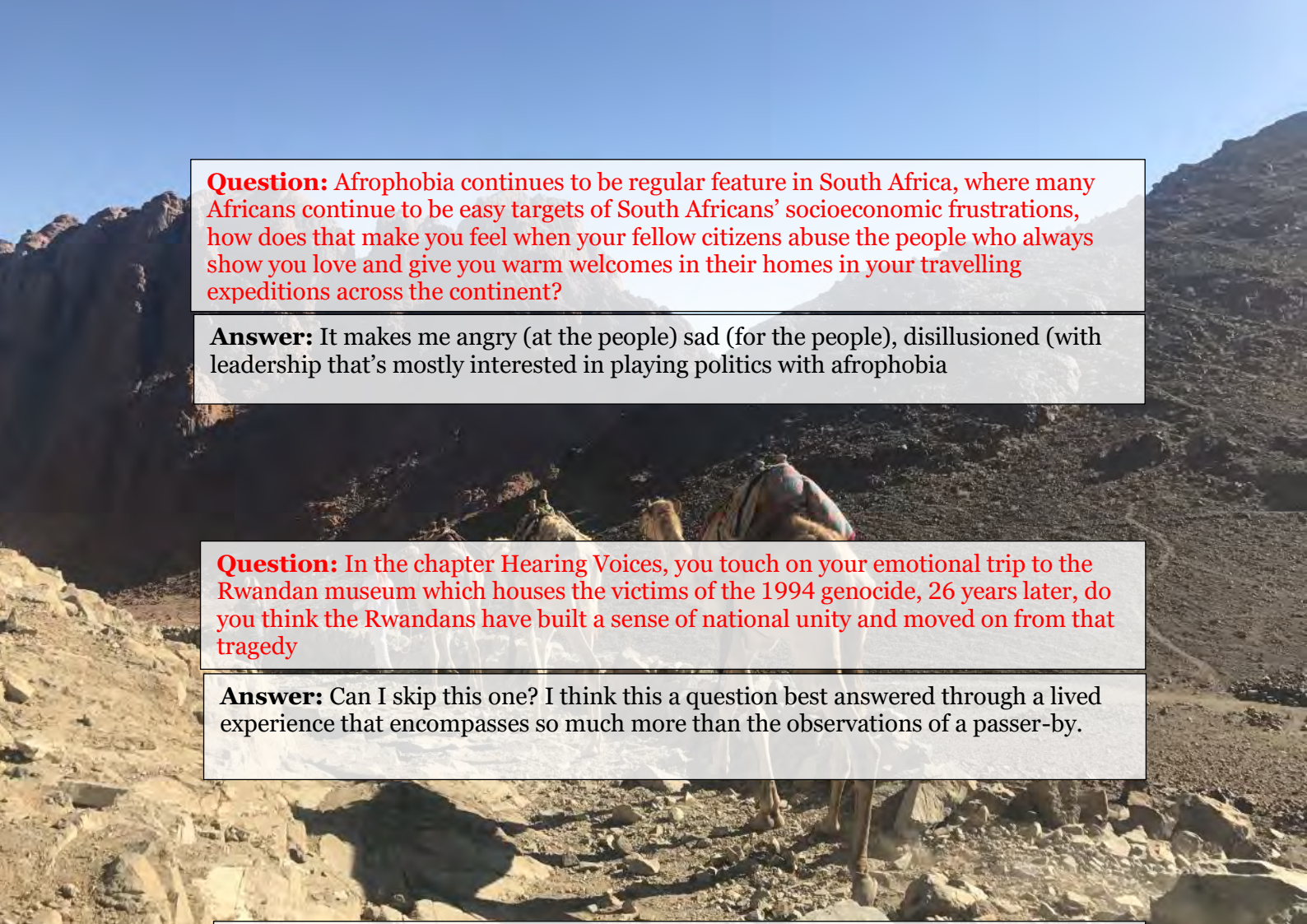
Question: Many South Africans continue to see themselves as "better Africans" than the rest of their African counterparts and would rather travel for holidays in Europe than in our continent, do you think there has been enough literature that promotes the good which this continent has to offer?

Answer: About better Africans: That's such a great pity. There are no better African, only Africans. About travels: People are free to do what they want to with their money but I advocate travelling Africa, especially for Black South Africans and for Muslim South Africans. Muslims need to experience the affirmation of public spaces that are inclusive. Travel to Tanzania, Sudan, North Africa, Senegal, Bamako and experience the sound of the call to prayer five times a day, experience dining in restaurants that have prayer rooms, experience public spaces that also cater to your identity. Black South Africans: our heritage has been reduced to one aspect (clothing) and it gets one day to shine everywhere. Corporate South Africa has turned heritage into brand identity and campaigns, but I dare you to walk into a boardroom dressed like it's Heritage Day on February 21 and see what happens. And it's not only the big bad corporate spaces. A black man was kicked out of the Gautrain for being dressed in his traditional garb (on a day that was not Heritage Day). While we fight systems that have rendered blackness invisible and unworthy except in spaces that are exclusively black, if you can travel then do yourself the honour of experiencing the healing and affirming energy of being black in a society that's tailor-made to accommodate, elevate and celebrate witness at the expense of blackness



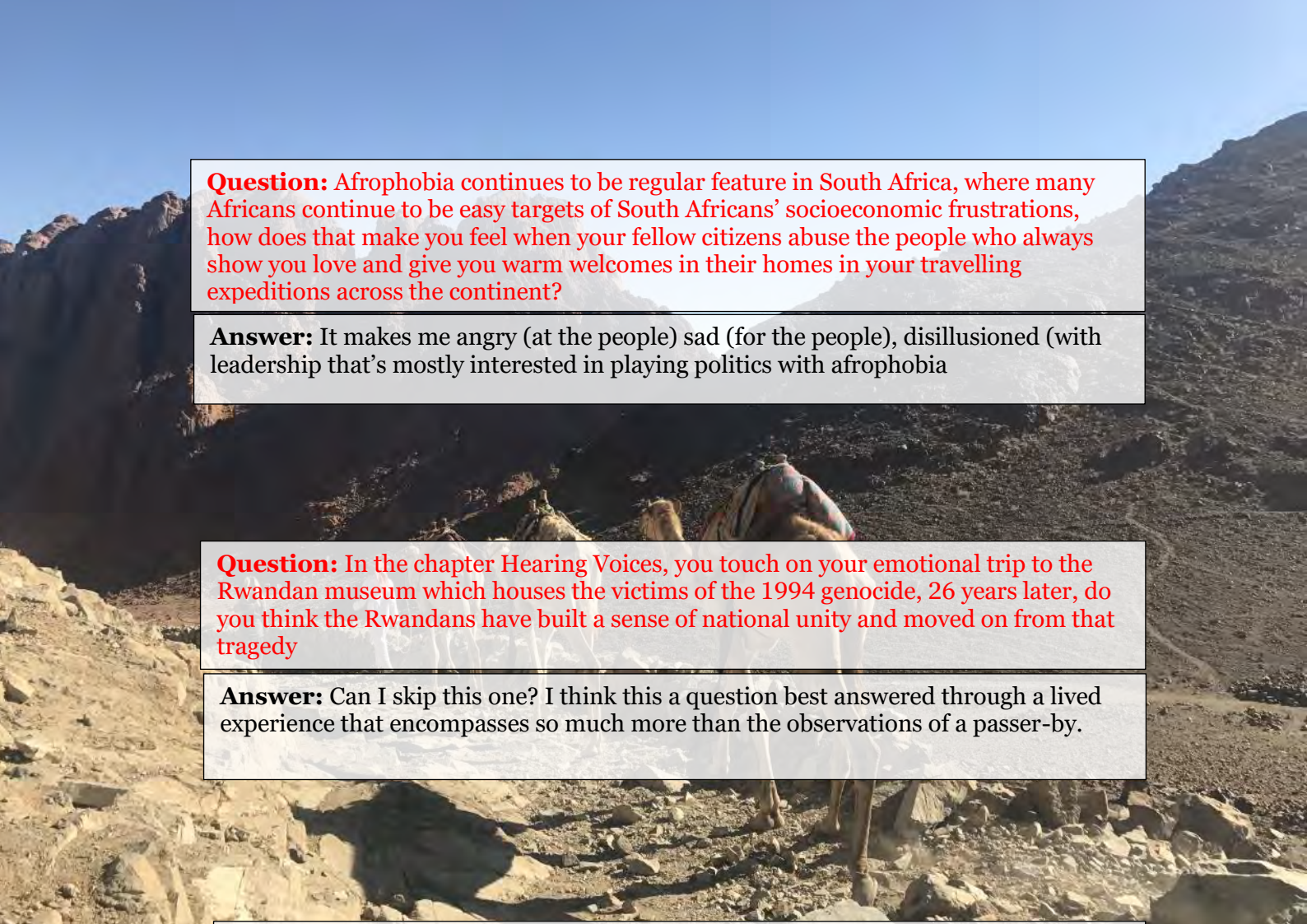
Question: Afrophobia continues to be regular feature in South Africa, where many Africans continue to be easy targets of South Africans' socioeconomic frustrations, how does that make you feel when your fellow citizens abuse the people who always show you love and give you warm welcomes in their homes in your travelling expeditions across the continent?

Answer: It makes me angry (at the people) sad (for the people), disillusioned (with leadership that's mostly interested in playing politics with afrophobia)



Question: In the chapter Hearing Voices, you touch on your emotional trip to the Rwandan museum which houses the victims of the 1994 genocide, 26 years later, do you think the Rwandans have built a sense of national unity and moved on from that tragedy

Answer: Can I skip this one? I think this a question best answered through a lived experience that encompasses so much more than the observations of a passer-by.



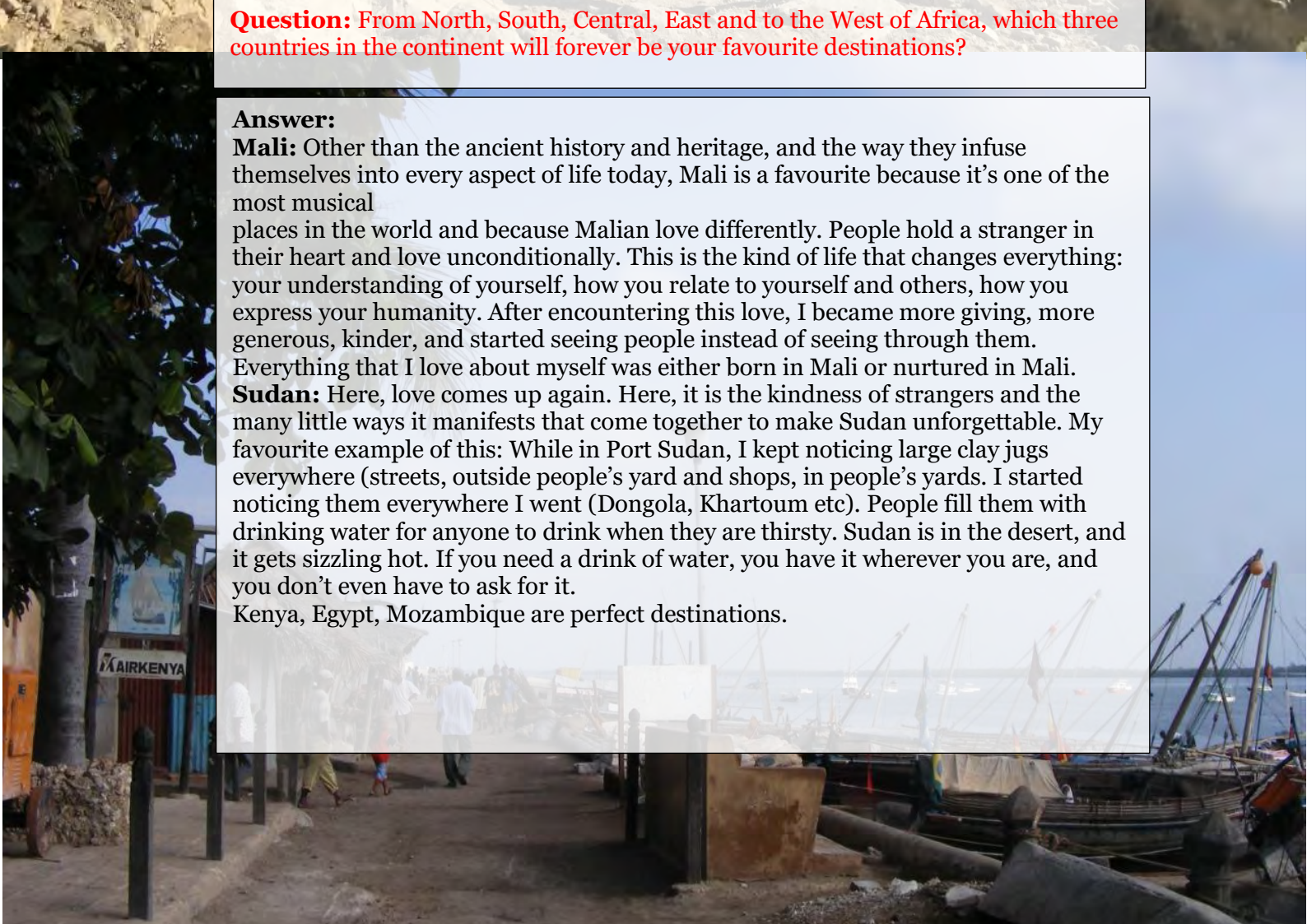
Question: From North, South, Central, East and to the West of Africa, which three countries in the continent will forever be your favourite destinations?

Answer:

Mali: Other than the ancient history and heritage, and the way they infuse themselves into every aspect of life today, Mali is a favourite because it's one of the most musical places in the world and because Malian love differently. People hold a stranger in their heart and love unconditionally. This is the kind of life that changes everything: your understanding of yourself, how you relate to yourself and others, how you express your humanity. After encountering this love, I became more giving, more generous, kinder, and started seeing people instead of seeing through them. Everything that I love about myself was either born in Mali or nurtured in Mali.

Sudan: Here, love comes up again. Here, it is the kindness of strangers and the many little ways it manifests that come together to make Sudan unforgettable. My favourite example of this: While in Port Sudan, I kept noticing large clay jugs everywhere (streets, outside people's yard and shops, in people's yards. I started noticing them everywhere I went (Dongola, Khartoum etc). People fill them with drinking water for anyone to drink when they are thirsty. Sudan is in the desert, and it gets sizzling hot. If you need a drink of water, you have it wherever you are, and you don't even have to ask for it.

Kenya, Egypt, Mozambique are perfect destinations.





Question: If you had to travel with three South African authors to Senegal for a live music concert featuring the great Salif Keita, who would that be and why them?

Answer:

1. Bongani Madondo because we'll talk about music non-stop and it will be a rich and layered conversation that goes far deeper than music.
2. Zukiswa Wanner because she's F.U.N
3. Niq Mhlongo because he has been around Africa, and I want to experience being on the road with him.

Question: Since you have recorded your African travelling experiences, is there a plan to do a book on another continent?

Answer: I'm always dreaming about big travel adventures, so you never know. I would love to write more books, better if they are about Africa or connected to Africa.

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: The Fishermen by Chogozie Obioma

EW BLOG

In Q&A with Authors

If You Keep Digging

KELETSO MOPAI

If You Keep Digging: 'I had such a headache from coming up with a title'- Keletso Mopai

Keletso Mopai is a South African storyteller who was born and raised in Lenyenye township, Limpopo. Her debut book titled *If You Keep Digging* was released in 2019 by BlackBird Books. *If you Keep Digging* is a collection of Mopai's short stories that touches on numerous themes such as racism, colorism, mental illness and others. In this exclusive Q&A session with EW Blog editor, Keletso talks about her favourite story in the book, societal ills such as gender-based violence, and her favourite queer books.

Question: For the benefit of our EW Blog readers, tell us who is Keletso Mopai and when she started writing?

Answer:

Keletso Mopai considers herself a storyteller and was born in Lenyenye township. Her work is published in numerous publications and listed for various literary prizes. She started

focusing on her writing exactly five years ago when her first short story was published by *Brittle Paper*.

Question: Your debut book, which is a collection of short stories is titled *If You Keep Digging*, what inspired that title?

Answer: I had such a headache from coming up with a title, so I made a list of about five titles that aligned with the book and I asked my friends to pick two and almost everyone chose *If You Keep Digging*. When I came up with it I was truly looking at the characters in the different stories in the collection and all of them seemed to be stuck in uncontrollable circumstances and I needed them to be seen, to be on the forefront, and maybe because I studied geology I knew how precious things are buried and need to be dug up.

Question: The stories in the book covers different themes such as racism and gender-based violence as suffered by women among others, do you think there has been enough literature that focuses on exposing the violence that is meted out on women and children in South Africa?

Answer: I think there is but it has mostly been in non-fiction, it's not done quite often in fiction in South Africa. I focus on fiction because it does not tell you but shows you.

Question: What do you think should be men's role in the fight against gender-based violence in South Africa?

Answer: I think it's absolutely ridiculous and sad that it's women who are fighting this when the perpetrators are sitting and critiquing those who fight and then continue to abuse them. South Africa is a terrifying place to live in. You can even tell from random conversations with South African men that this patriarchal thinking and living is the only thing they know, and they justify and protect it in order to feel "powerful" not knowing that toxic masculinity torments and limits them as well. To answer your question, men should do what women are doing now, marching, exposing abusers and getting counseling.

Question: The story of Lisakhanya in your story 'Hair Tales' resonates with many young people especially young black unemployed female graduates, what do you think Corporate South Africa should do in order to make sure that the many Lisakhanya out there are not denied access to economic opportunities just because of their race and language?

Answer: Lisakhanya is a character I enjoyed writing in that story, and because the story is interlinked between three characters, her part of the story I was familiar with because I've experienced a similar interview she had after graduation. Where the obvious racist set up in most South African companies is so blatant and in your face, and the strange thing is that in that moment when you are seated there being interviewed for your first job you can't really register what's happening, it's after the interview is over that you realise you were never going to get the job regardless of your qualifications, talent or intelligence because the system has already been designed and in it you don't get the job because of the color of your skin, that you don't speak Afrikaans fluently, and that your hair is knotted together in an big afro. What they should do is hire Black graduates and pay them right. That's it.

Question: You kept a female's voice in almost all the stories, which story was your favourite in the book and why?

Answer: I love all the stories but if I have to pick one, I'd say my favorite story is 'In Papa's Name', and strangely enough it's told from a perspective of a male child. I enjoyed writing that story as it contained moments I'm very familiar with because of the setting, which is my home township.

Question: With all the stories in the book, what message(s) were you trying to convey to the readers, especially to the male readers?

Answer: The thing is with this book, it's a compilation of work that I've been writing since 2015 and I had no idea back then that I'd one day have all these stories in one book, so I can't say what the plan was. But I'd say that when I decided that I was going to publish a collection which was around mid 2018 I knew how important the issues that I highlighted in the stories are and somehow hoped readers will see my characters, empathize, hear and care for them, and if they can do that then as a storyteller I've done my job in making sure that social issues such as homophobia, racism, colorism, rape, etc are confronted in writing.

Question:

Should your readers expect a second book this year?

Answer: Not this year or next year, unfortunately. I have to write first. And I do have books that will come, just not soon enough as they'd want.

Question: Which is your favourite queer book?

Answer: I have three. *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, *Such a Lonely, Lovely Road* by Kagiso Lesego Molohe and *If I Stay Right Here* by Chwayita Ngamlana.

Question: If you had to invite three female South African authors to a book club, who will it be and why them?

Answer: Oh my, that's hard. But Kagiso Lesego Molohe, Malebo Sephodi, and Kopano Matlwa.

Question: What message do you have for young aspiring authors?

Answer: Read. Read. Read. Read. Write. Read. Read. And repeat.

Eva Mazza Discusses her Working Relationship with Melinda Ferguson and Writing About the Secrets of Stellenbosch



Eva Mazza announced herself into the South African literary industry with a riveting and scandalous debut novel titled *Sex, Lies & Stellenbosch*. The novel received much love from many South Africans and even the conservative Stellenbosch residents managed to get a copy of the book. Following the success of the novel, Mazza followed that up with a sequel titled, *Sex, Lies Declassified*. In this exclusive interview with EW Blog editor, Mazza talks about her relationship with her publisher, Melinda Ferguson, writing the two books and whether there's enough literature on feminism and gender-based violence.

Question: You and Melinda Ferguson produced yet another book together, how is it working with a literary giant like Melinda?

Answer: Melinda is driven and passionate about what she does. She juggles a whole lot of balls be it editing, workshops, publishing, writing. She's a car journo, she's a cigarette rights freedom fighter, she's a partner to Matt and she's completely hooked on work – so you'd expect her not to have too much time for you. But she always makes time for her authors and actually, she makes them feel extremely special. She is bat shit-crazy but fun. She has a nose for what will sell – so thank goodness she had a sense that my novel would perhaps be marketable because she doesn't normally publish fiction.

Question: *Sex, Lies Declassified* is your latest novel, did the success of the first novel put you under pressure to do a sequel or it was always in your plans to do so?

Answer: We left a 'loose-end' in the first book (although the book has a definite ending) just in case *Sex, Lies and Stellenbosch* became a success and readers would want more. I was under pressure, deadline wise to get it done in a year but very excited that there was a demand for more.

Question: Stellenbosch residents are known for their opulent lifestyle and their conservative nature, what kind of feedback did you receive from the residents of the town following the release of your debut novel, *Sex, Lies & Stellenbosch*?

Answer: I don't think the residents of Stellies are as conservative as they are made out to be. There definitely is a conservative group (one journalist was horrified by the sex scenes and the fact that I had not mentioned the oak trees). Probably the book has been ignored by those who disapprove. I am so grateful that the response has been overwhelming and positive in Stellenbosch and I am excited to say that it is a best seller in *Exclusive Books Stellenbosch* (which sadly is closing down due to the impact of the pandemic), just a week after the book was on the shelves, so that speaks volumes. I have a very supportive network of friends, some of whom I haven't met, but we are friends nonetheless through social media.

Question: Jen is a central character in your first novel, take us through the process of how the character came about?

Answer: Well, I was on the cusp of 50 along with many of my friends. In life there are phases that we all tend to go through at certain times and turning fifty is a biggie. It's the new forty because women seem to start families later and don't seem to age as they used to. But the 'mid-life' crisis is a thing for both men and women. Women particularly feel vulnerable at this time, especially if they have spent their lives rearing children and supporting husbands,

which is an honourable and very difficult choice they sometimes decide to make. Many of my friends were succumbing to these crises, be it their husband's (or wives) having affairs, the empty nest-and-now what syndrome, the restless I-need-to-hurry-up-and-make-something-with-my-life angst, nobody-will-want-me-so-I'll-stay decision... so I was inspired by this. I don't think it is relegated to only one race group or to one area, it's a universal thing and Jen was that universal character who walks in on her husband in a compromising position with another woman and suddenly she is forced to decide what to do – and when you are not financially sound, when you feel there isn't much going for you and your choices are limited, your decision to go or stay becomes a difficult one. This situation transcends colour, class or creed. This story just happens to be set in Stellenbosch and Jen's shackles are golden – but they are shackles nonetheless.

Question: Despite finding out that John was cheating with Frankie, Jen wanted to still stay in her marriage, what advice do you have for women who stay in loveless marriages just for financial security?

Answer: I don't have advice really. It's an individual choice that is often complicated by many factors. What I do advise women (I have four daughters) is value yourself, you are definitely equal to anybody, male or female, treat every human being with respect and expect the same from them. Try to be as financially independent as you can be, and even if you do decide to be the one who holds back on career, make sure your foot is always in some working door that will generate an income for you if you need it.

Question: Patriarchy was among some of the themes in your first novel, do you think there's enough local literature written on how to dismantle patriarchy and misogyny in the 21st century?

Answer: Yes, we have some very fiery feminists in our midst, one of them being Pumla Dineo Gqola who I think is at the forefront in this country when it comes to literature on the subject. Then there's Kharnita Mohamed whose book, *Called to Song* is launching soon. But besides books on the subject, we have so many stories of GBV in our country which exposes patriarchy and toxic masculinity and which forces us to confront it daily (be it in the news or through our own experiences). Fiction too, creates stories for women about these very issues, and this is why the value of women's fiction should not be underestimated, especially the message it conveys to readers about these very issues.

Question: Without giving much, how is Jen's character developed in the new novel, *Sex, Lies Declassified*?

Answer: Jen is a stronger more sexually confident woman. She has grown from her tumultuous year and a bit since she found her husband with his wine rep; she has found love and she (and the reader) has bought into the idea of a happy ending. But the question is, is there ever a happy ending? There are pockets of happiness in our lives that come in phases – and generally we can at the end of our lives perhaps say, 'yes, we had a happy life' but life

sends curve balls – and in the beginning of *Sex, Lies DECLASSIFIED*, we find Jen restless. So, her journey is not complete. She is not as fulfilled as we expect her to be. She is still discovering who she is and what she wants and her resolve for authenticity is even stronger now. She is much more determined to find what really makes her happy despite the guilt of family, lover and friends' accusations that she is being selfish.

Question: What inspired you to write about the 'secrets and lies' of Stellenbosch?

Answer: My friend's husband had been cheating on her with her friend under her nose (she was not from Stellenbosch) there was a woman who I had met briefly whose husband had been so deviant and had led such a duplicitous life that it was hard for her to actually believe his behaviour never mind accept it; and then of course there was 'that wealthy businessman' who owned horses and had Stellenbosch eating out of his hand – and was flaunting his girlfriend at polo matches... the question arose, if all of us knew, how did she not know? And if she did know, why hadn't she left him?

Question: If you were to invite three South African authors for wine tasting in Stellenbosch, who will it be and why them?

Answer: Three authors for wine tasting? I'd have to make sure they drank, but most writers drink. It would be Jackie Phamotse as I've promised her a tour of Stellies' wine farms and we have always supported one another. I'd like to get to know her better. I would definitely have Qarnita Loxton around too, because we get along famously and I love her writing and we can bemoan how the literati view our genre of fiction in this country. I would love to meet Angela Makholwa, I must say I picked up her book *The Blessed Girl* at the airport a few years ago and her writing inspired me as did the topic which again speaks volumes about patriarchy, exploitation of younger women etc ... and can I have one more at the table? Zakes Mda, he's a playwright and an author and from what he has written he is a champion for the cause. He's a legend. And we need a rose amongst us thorns.

Question: What advice will you give to young people who would like to pursue writing as a full-time profession?

Answer: I say go for it. Just don't be despondent if you do need to juggle writing with another career – it's not quite as profitable as one would hope. But if you're good you can do many related things that will add to your income such as writing workshops, editing, script writing – so try to be as diverse as you can be.

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: I am currently rereading *Sex, Lies Declassified* as I need to start on the third book in the trilogy, and I have just finished *The Gold Diggers* by Sue Nyathi.



Busisekile Khumalo Opens Up About Writing The Harvard Wife and Self-Publishing Business

Busisekile Khumalo is a Zimbabwean-born writer currently living in South Africa. She continues to make a major impact in South Africa's literary space. Khumalo's first novel titled *The Harvard Wife* dominated many book clubs in the country. She followed that up with yet another riveting book called *Nomaswazi*, which also gained appreciation from different quarters. In this week's Q&A session with EW Blog editor, Ezekiel Kekana, Khumalo talks about what triggered her to write *The Harvard Wife*, the business of self-publishing, and dealing with criticism.

Question: From the voting poll we conducted with our readers, *The Harvard Wife* seems to be their favourite book. What really inspired the storyline in the book?

Answer: I'm so grateful for the readers who voted for *The Harvard Wife*, it's one of my favourite books too. What inspired the storyline was where I was at that point in my life and the woman I aspired to be. I was an unemployed graduate and I aspired to be an accomplished independent woman but I then asked myself, is life easy for the kind of woman I aspire to be in our current socio-economic environment as Africans? The answer to that inspired the storyline.

Question: When writing *The Harvard Wife*, did you have a specific target audience that you were trying to reach out to?

Answer: No. I was writing mostly for myself and then I shared it with a friend who loved it and since I had no knowledge at all of the publishing industry, another friend suggested I open a blog. My blog on WordPress didn't get the desired engagement. A friend suggested I open a Facebook page and share a few chapters to get people's reaction to the book. The

response was amazing across the board, from young women still in school to the more matured women and even men.

Question: Rape is one of the themes in the book, with the assault of Oyama, do you believe that they have been enough literature on this subject which truly demands attention in South Africa?

Answer: I don't think there can ever be enough literature to unravel the complexity of rape in our society. It goes deeper than just the physical act of being violated, I don't think even I did enough justice to it in *The Harvard Wife*. Hence I am working on the sequel which is Oyama's story and hopefully, I can explore the theme further in how it shapes the woman she becomes. There is still a lot of room in the literary world to draw attention to rape in its many forms from paedophilia to corrective rape.

Question: Many Zimbabwean-born writers continue to do well in South Africa in terms of circulation, sales, and branding themselves as reputable writers, what is it that the South African literary market has that the Zimbabwean market lacks?

Answer: A better economy, in as much as book sales in South Africa, isn't as high as the rest of the world they are still better than in Zimbabwe where basic commodities are hard to come by. Books then become a luxury that many can't afford.

Question: Many authors in South Africa still have their day jobs besides having established themselves as writers in the country, what do you think should be done to make the literary space more lucrative for writers?

Answer: For literature to be recognized as the essential service that it is and many more literary spaces to be open to all authors, traditionally and self-published. For libraries to order books from local authors instead of prioritizing on International literature and for more active legislation against the piracy of books. For authors as well to learn how to effectively market their work.

Question: We have seen so many authors in SA going through the self-publishing route, would you advise start-up writers to also self-publish their books?

Answer: I'm self-published myself so yes, I would but only if they are willing to put in the work. To do their research diligently and aim to produce work that is presentable and marketable. Self-publishing is a lot of work and there is also the issue of funding, be willing

to start selling even from the boot of your car like Dudu Busani-Dube initially started with the Hlomu series. The hard work is worth having control over your own creative process.

Question: How do you respond to criticism about your work, especially with relation to negative reviews to some of your books?

Answer: I've grown so much through criticism and negative reviews, I know there's always room for improvement and if someone picks up some grammatical errors I usually ask them to point them out and I go back and fix them. I have edited my work numerous times and I will not hesitate to edit it again if someone picks up something I might have overlooked.

Question: Which writer (s) inspired you to start writing?

Answer: Dudu Busani-Dube. I remember reading *Hlomu the wife* and thinking how refreshing and an easy read it was. I've also always looked up to the work of Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie, Danielle Steel and Sue Nyathi.

Question: If you were to invite three African writers to a book club of your own, who will it be and why them?

Answer: Lola Shoneyin, just to ask her what went through her mind when she was describing the character of Baba Segi.

Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie, I'm such a fan girl, I won't even hide it, I was bummed when I couldn't attend the Abantu Festival which she graced.

Fred Khumalo, to hear his thoughts on the genocide in Zimbabwe called Gukurahundi

Question: Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: I just finished reading *The secret lives of Baba Segi's wives* by Lola Shoneyin last week and I want to reward myself with reading *The wife between us* by Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen after I finish writing my next book. Call it an incentive to write faster.



Fiona Snyckers Talks About *Lacuna*, JM Coetzee and her Favourite Writers

Fiona Snyckers is one of South Africa's most celebrated writers and a role model to many aspiring writers. She has written seven books thus far, with *Lacuna* her most recent novel published by Pan MacMillan. In this week's EW Blog Q&A session, the award-winning writer chats with our editor Ezekiel Kekana about writing *Lacuna*, JM Coetzee and whether men should write books about subjects such as rape and feminism.

Question: For the sake of our EW Blog readers, I think let us start with a short background of who is Fiona Snyckers, the writer?

Answer: I have written ever since I was a child. In my twenties, I worked as a freelance journalist for a few years. My first novel was published in 2009. Altogether, I have had seven novels published. They range in genre from young adult to romantic suspense to thriller, and literary fiction.

Question: What or who inspired you to write your last book, *Lacuna*?

Answer: I wrote it as a response to J M Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. I wanted to take his character Lucy Lurie and transform her for my own purposes to explore themes of whiteness, white feminism, recovering from rape, and the nature of narrative.

Question: *Lacuna* addresses one of the pertinent issues in the country, which is rape, do you think the country's criminal system has made strides in protecting and seeking justice for rape survivors?

Answer: We have a very advanced constitution and a liberal jurisprudence In South Africa, but in practise rape survivors are not protected and seldom find justice. We have one of the highest rates of sexual assault and femicide in the world. Rape survivors are failed at every turn – first by their own families, then by the police they attempt to make reports to, and then by prosecutors that taint or lose evidence, or are bought off by the perpetrators.

Question: *Lacuna* is seen as a direct response to JM Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*, have you since managed to speak to Coetzee about his thoughts on your book?

Answer: No, I have not. Coetzee is known for his disinclination to engage with criticisms of his work. He “remains above the fray”. But I don't think it is necessary for me to engage directly with him. Our books stand in intertextual juxtaposition to each other. There have been several creative responses to *Disgrace* and my book joins that fraternity.

Question: Do you think men should write books about subjects such as rape and feminism?

Answer: I wrestle with this extensively in *Lacuna*. As we know, men are also the victims of sexual assault and also suffer under the patriarchy. As such, their voices are a valid addition to the discourse around these topics. When it comes to men speaking “for” women and imagining how they would think and feel in response to sexual assault, it becomes more problematic. But ultimately, I believe that every writer has the right to write about every topic. If someone doesn't like it, they are free to criticise it or to set up their own competing narrative.

Question: If you were to co-write a book with any African author, who will that be and why?

Answer: I have never been attracted to the idea of co-writing with anyone. I am very much a loner as a writer. But if I had to pick someone, I think Zukiswa Wanner and I could have fun cooperating on a project. We are both fascinated by questions of identity.

Question: Who are your five favourite authors of all time?

Answer: That is a very difficult question. If you were to ask me ten years ago or in ten years' time, you would probably get a different answer. Today, I would say P G Wodehouse, E F Benson, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chinua Achebe, and Petina Gappah.

Question: If you were to invite three South African authors to a tea party, who will that be?

Answer: I am going to name authors that I have not socialised with in a while, rather than ones that I see regularly. Siphiwo Mahala, Thando Mgqolozana, and Zukiswa Wanner. We would spend the whole tea party missing Angela Makholwa. Ndumiso Ngcobo and Nozizwe Cynthia Jele.

Question:

Would you advise young writers to pursue writing as a full-time profession?

Answer: No. It is extremely difficult to make a living from writing. I would suggest that you keep your day job while you establish and build up your reputation as a writer. Only when you have had a big break as a traditionally published author, or have set up a steady income stream as an independently published author, should you consider going full time.

Question:

Should your readers expect a new book this year from you?

Answer: I write and independently publish several books every year. The latest is a young adult time travel series called the Time Mavericks series. I also have a couple of books out on submission with traditional publishers at the moment. There is no way of knowing when and if they might appear.

Question:

Which book are you currently reading?

Answer: "Afterland" by Lauren Beukes.

EW BLOG

In Q&A with Authors

A Close Personal Encounter with Sue Nyathi

Sukoluhle Nyathi or Sue as she is affectionately known, is the most respected author from Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. She introduced herself to many South Africans with her riveting novel, *The Polygamist*. And ever since then, many South African readers have fallen in love with her writing. Her latest novel, *The Gold Diggers*, continues to be among the most celebrated and well-read book in South Africa. EW Blog editor, Ezekiel Kekana, interviewed Sue in a bid to get know her on a personal level. Here is the Q&A of that conversation.



Question: At what age did you realize that you want to be a writer?

Answer: I was a writer from a very young age. I would cut pictures from magazines and write stories around them. By the time I was twelve I was writing mini novels premised on your Sweet Valley High series. These were circulated amongst students in my class and they became my first readers and they egged me to keep writing.

Question: Who were five writers who inspired you to start writing?

Answer: It would certainly be the following, in this order...

Francine Pascal, Jean M Auel, Helen van Slyke, Sidney Sheldon and Martina Cole.

Question: Which are your five all-time favourite books?

Answer: This is always a terribly difficult question to answer!!

Pride and Prejudice Jane Austen

An Elegy for Easterly Petina Gappah

The Last Don Mario Puzo

No Honour among Thieves Jeffrey Archer

Tanamera Noel Barber

Question: If you were to co-write a book with any author, who will that be?

Answer: Another tough question. I think it would have to be Desiree Martin. I love how she writes and I think we would be able to craft some magic together.

Question: What challenges do you normally face during the writing process?

Answer: I think for me it's finding the uninterrupted quiet time to write. The challenges of writing, trying to earn a living and raising a child are very real. I am one of those people who can only write in complete silence.

Question: What are the benefits of being a writer in Africa?

Answer: I honestly can't perceive any to be honest unless you are a Nigerian writer. West African writers are the flavour of African writing and Southern African writers tend to be largely ignored. The only value of being a writer in Africa is when you get published overseas and suddenly you will get

more endorsements in Africa.

In the big scheme of themes, African writers still get a small piece of the pie.

Question: **Will you advise young people to pursue writing as a full-time profession?**

Answer: I would not advise anyone to pursue writing as a full time profession until they become a bestselling international author. Only then is it a sustainable career choice. The reality is most African countries can't support writers full time because we simply can't achieve the sales. So the reality is most people will write full time while pushing a full time job. What I would advise is for young people to pursue careers that will give them a leeway to write e.g. teaching, lecturing, scriptwriting. You want a career that will enable you to pay your bills while giving you the flexibility to write.

Question: **Which book are you currently reading?**

Answer: I am reading Kintu by Jennifer Makumbi. I have been reading it for a while. I thought I would progress during Lockdown but reading has actually been a struggle. I have actually been doing more writing than reading.

Question: **Are there any plans to turn one of your books into a mini-series or even a movie?**

Answer: The Polygamist was optioned in 2017 as a movie. It is still in development. There was interest to convert the Gold Diggers into a series but I have not received any firm offers.

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