

An Archive Amabali
Wethu Project



AFRICAN FEMINIST SOLIDARITIES™

A collection of essays, poems and artwork that explores
the different textures of African Feminist solidarities

AFRICAN FEMINIST SOLIDARITIES - NOVEMBER 2021

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A collection of essays, poems and artwork that explores
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Foreword

Choosing the right words to say or to write is one of the hardest aspects of human interaction and communication. As an exchange of experiences and feelings, communication can be regarded as a process whereby a form of pleasure is derived from the idea of being heard and or being understood. As I enter the last years of my early '20s, I realise that I have become more anxious about sharing my views publicly. Yet, the growing presence of both social media and the internet has made it possible to create multiple platforms which have become communities for the engagement of multiple socio-political and economic issues affecting thousands and millions of people across South Africa and the world.

The inception of Archive Amabali Wethu was inspired by my desire to use multiple mediums of artistic expression and civic technology to share my story as a survivor of gender-based violence navigating this life. I wanted to share my experiences as an activist and as this woman I'm constantly becoming, this person evolving as she is being shaped by her worldly experiences. This is to say that advocacy and activism has always been something of an interest to me and it has so happened that my own experiences with encountering and addressing systemic violence have been publicly documented in the past five years.

I was academically excluded from university in 2017 for protesting against rape culture in the

#RURerenceList movement and protests. This was covered by major media houses across the country for the public to scrutinize. I have since then been using my story to garner support from a community of people who believe(d) in me and the cause I've been fighting, to clear my name and to show how the university has used its disproportionate powers against the student led movement through silencing the women students it deemed the leaders of the movement and simultaneously protecting its reputation through multiple discredibility campaigns supported by members of the South African justice system.

I realised that I didn't want to depend on mainstream media to tell my story, or for it to be the platform where we have other conversations about the plight of Black women across the country and the continent. Our daily reality(ties) of navigating patriarchal dominance need to be archived and our experiences with seeking social justice must be recorded for these are lessons to guide the creation of a violent-free future we desire.

I want to express myself when I choose to, to be able to engage in differing complexities about the world around us and to spotlight how we, Black women and queers are building our lives and essentially surviving through the persistence of solidarity and the radical kindness we've shown one another which has inspired many, myself included, a continued journey of healing and recovery.

This idea led to the formation of the organisation



During the #RURerenceList protests.

With time and growing conceptualising it has now become the organisation's first edition digital publication which hosts different bodies of work that speak to African Feminist inspired Solidarity...

in 2019 between myself and two other Black women activists who shared similar passions and ideas on archival work and digitising stories. We were interested in facilitating spaces where we could debrief or share ideas and fantasies about the kind of societies and futures we desired and are working towards.

Since its inception, Archive Amabali Wethu has undergone a number of developmental processes which include rebranding and the evolution of its involvement in the creative space. This digital publication started out as an idea proposed by a fellow activist who approached the organisation in 2020 in search of a partnership.

With time and growing conceptualising it has now become the organisation's first edition digital publication which hosts different bodies of work that speak to African Feminist inspired Solidarity and explores several themes on sexual and gender identity, disrupting patriarchal violence, navigating love and loss as well as exploring African feminist inspired solidarity. This publication highlights the framework of how women have collectively, over centuries, navigated violence and injustice.

Finishing this project has helped me realise a forgotten childhood dream. As a little girl in Grade 5, I imagined myself working for some sort of publishing house that centred the voices of people who looked like me. I've always been interested

in media and representation and this anthology has facilitated a space where the organisation can explore storytelling in praxis through the use of civic technology and creative mediums of expression, in line with commonly-recognised feminist principles and philosophy.

I want to continue to contribute in this area by creating digital communities through using creative communication methods as a framework in advocacy work on sexual & gender-based violence. I want to promote freedom of expression, connect with people and inspire safe and affirming spaces for engagement on these social issues where we can contribute to knowledge sharing.

What I am trying to say is that through this work I feel I have been given the opportunity to connect with and explore different realities. I've been reminded of the beauty of connection through sharing and storytelling. I hope that when reading the personal, academic and poetic writings in this collection, that when viewing our visual artists' work, you will leave feeling just as connected and seen. I hope you will feel fired up to continue the fight against patriarchal violence, and carry on disrupting the harmful narratives about us.

Thank you to everyone who has trusted me with this project, who has trusted my organisation with their work, and for the people who have made it possible for us to be here. This platform will continue to grow in collaborative ways to host many more bodies of work, and for us to Archive Amabali Wethu (Archive Our Stories).

Camagu!

YOLANDA DYANTYI



Pointing fingers, June 2021

By Angella Ilibagiza
Collage

Over the past decade, there's been an alarming increase in teen pregnancies in Rwanda. The situation is heartbreaking. While we cannot deny that adolescents are having sexual relations amongst themselves, the heartbreaking fact is that the majority of teen pregnancies are as a result of rape. Even so, the girls are blamed for it, especially by their parents and families, and some are even shunned and cut off. This victim blaming shifts the blame from the rapist to the victim. Victim blaming silences other victims of sexual violence as they are afraid of being blamed which perpetuates rape culture. This gives predatory people power and emboldens them to continue sexually abusing more victims with no consequences.

Essays,
Nonfiction &
Flash Nonfiction

Digital Solidarity:

A Lesson from the
#menaretrash
movement

ANDILE MADONSELA

When I was awakened to the issues around my femaleness and blackness, I was very excited and impressed. I couldn't wait to share my new found consciousness with other people who would resonate with me. In my conversations I would quote bell hooks, Steve Biko, Franz Fanon, Phumla Dineo Gqola and the like. In one such conversation, my friend, Thabang, said that I should consider picking one struggle. To choose which injustice angers me the most, the "gender issue" or the "blackness issue". At that time, for the life of me, I did not understand why I had to pick. Am I not a black woman? Both blackness and femaleness define me, right?

I said this to him, "Thabang I cannot separate the two, I am both black and female".

After more conversations with a number of people, I came to a realisation: people are generally not as angry about issues of gender as they are about issues of race. Everyone agrees and recognises that racism is an injustice; everyone agrees that there is

a need for black people to redefine what blackness is, and in the words of Bob Marley, we all agree that we should emancipate ourselves from the mental slavery that is colonisation. I also realised that we do not all agree that we need to change the ways in which we view and treat women and girls.

The people I spoke to would try to explain away the reasons for sexist behaviour and patriarchal beliefs. "No Andile, you see in our culture...", "Women have to understand that...", "It's not all men", "You can't even say the word patriarchy in Zulu", "Men are also victims", "This is a plot against black men who are trying".

Yey, I have heard it all!

The atrocities that women are subjected to every day are dismissed by society; dismissed as norms, and frequently, dismissed as being concerns that are secondary to racism. This dates back to the attainment of "freedom", where the race agenda was placed at the forefront. Which makes sense, right? Apartheid was a segregation by race, not by

“I eventually found my home in a hashtag. The story is funny because I initially joined Twitter for the memes. Little did I know that the platform would sharpen my feminism.”

gender. So, it makes sense to address racism now, *we will see what we do with gender*. 27 years later, black women remain at the bottom of the hierarchy, battling against classism, remnants of colonialism, racism and sexism. The recent #Feesmustfall movement was a reminder that issues around gender injustices remain secondary even in this generation. During the protests, one prominent male #Feesmustfall activist was quoted saying, “Our focus right now should be on the question of race, we will deal with the gender question later”.

With a heavy heart I recall Oluwatoyin “Toyin” Salau, a 19-year-old woman who was at the forefront of the #Blacklivesmatter protest. She was later assaulted and murdered by a black man who was also in the protest. This proves that being a black female is dangerous everywhere and in every space: being a black woman is dangerous even in spaces where we are fighting for and defending blackness.

I yearn for safe spaces for black women and girls. Homes, streets, churches, crèches, work spaces, universities, taxi ranks and protest spaces are all spaces where we are harassed, silenced, assaulted or killed. I yearn for a space where we can just be. A space where young girls can sit anyhow, where we can wear whatever we want, where we can walk to the shop and not be harassed and a space where our bodies will belong to us.

Black women continue to suffer at the hands of black men, constantly living in fear and barely surviving. But we will address this later, right? In my conversion I have realised that people accept the dark cloud of gender-based violence and femicide

over us as a norm: another day, another rape case, nothing new. I searched for a place where gender injustice is recognised for what it is: as an injustice. I felt homeless, wondering why it seems like I am the only person who is angered by the gender injustice I witness everyday.

I eventually found my home in a hashtag. The story is funny because I initially joined Twitter for the memes. Little did I know that the platform would sharpen my feminism. When I joined Twitter, I was a *nice* feminist. I would distance myself from feminists who use profanity, who hate men and protest naked. After I witnessed people on the platform (women, men and queer beings) share their experiences under the patriarchal system and what feminism means to them, I became an angry feminist. I am now inspired by those feminists I used to distance myself from.

The #Menaretrash movement was created by women not only to call out men on their toxic masculinity but to discuss issues of rape culture, rape, femicide and abuse. Owing to its language, the hashtag sparked a lot of controversy. This harsh language was important since it sparked necessary conversations. It also emphasised the magnitude of the problem: we cannot retweet a missing girl or woman every single day, only for some of them to turn up dead, buried in a shallow grave or burnt and it remains business as usual.

To this movement, some men and women responded to the hashtag with a counter-hashtag, #Notallmen. They pointed out individual achievements of single men but failed to check male

privilege: the privilege of never wondering if you are next, never fearing that rejecting advances will lead to your death, being paid more than your female counterparts for the same job, not having to modify your body so you are less of a target (breast ironing rituals), having a religion or culture that recognises your humanity, not having to share your location because you fear that could be your 'last seen', not having the contributions of males erased from history – and the list goes on.

The digital age has changed the ways in which women organise for survival. Organising is no longer limited to writing placards and marching or belonging to a feminist organisation or movement. Women are organising through a hashtag, and everyone can express unity with a retweet. The rise of feminist hashtag movements such as #MeToo, #Bringbackourgirls, #Rhodeswar, #Totalshutdown, #MuteRKelly and #Shemultiplied have created a safe space for solidarity and for demanding alternative justice. Under the #Menaretrash movement I have found fellow women who share the same experiences as me. People who are angered by gender injustice as I am. This is what solidarity looks like to me. There is no need for all of us to be as influential as bell hooks, but with a retweet, I have contributed to the feminist movement; I have shown solidarity.

Although the idea of organising and showing solidarity with a hashtag is new, organising itself is not new. Throughout history women have been organising for survival. Notably the march that happened on the 9th of August 1956, where women from different backgrounds came together to march to the Union buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws of Apartheid.

So, what does solidarity mean to me?

For me, solidarity means that I never have to stand alone. Solidarity means power, collective action that can overcome individual limitations. Solidarity for me means sisterhood and taking on a fellow sister's struggle as my own, even if I myself have never struggled in the same way. This also points to my allyship to the LGBTQIAP+ community. Although I have never lived a day in South Africa

as a queer person, and I am privileged as a cis het heterosexual person, I have taken it upon myself to listen, and where required, to amplify voices. This is solidarity for me.

Thabang, I have an update for you. I have finally picked my struggle: I am female before I am black. By virtue of being female, I am oppressed in spaces where race does not matter. I do not know what freedom is because I live in constant fear. My body does not belong to me because the female body too easily becomes a crime scene.

Rest in power Oluwatoyin "Toyin" Salau. I am really sorry. You deserved more. I am sorry that a man thought you were not worthy of life. I am sorry that no one came to your rescue. I am sorry that your body did not belong to you. Thank you for standing up for what you believed in. I am sorry that defending blackness and speaking up against police brutality led to your passing. Your activism continues to inspire so many of us. Your words, "You cannot take my blackness away from me, my blackness is not for your consumption" will remain relevant throughout the fight of reclaiming blackness. We will forever be inspired by you and we will forever speak of your name.

There are many more names I should mention. So, rest in power to every black woman who died because gender injustice was considered less important than racism. I say "rest in power" instead of "rest in peace" because I believe the souls of these women will not rest in peace until our societies are at peace. This gesture is another call for solidarity, another call for us to all continue the struggle for social justice.

I Don't Have Exes

A Personal Essay

THEMBELIHLE NGCAI

My experience of disability has always been characterised by comparison. I'm the only disabled person in my family. I was one of the very few visibly disabled people in high school, university, and later in my career as a journalist. How I was disciplined at home, which school activities I participated in, my longevity in employment and now, romantic relationships, sexual liberation, and freedom neatly on the opposite column, I gauged myself against the how, when, what, and why of my non-disabled counterparts to make sure I wasn't being cheated out of the life everyone else had.

I wanted nothing more, nothing less. No allowances; no asterisk, no footnote.

"What would you say is the reason you have never been in a long-term relationship?" Quickly, I minimise my WhatsApp. I open my Notes app where a text essay on ableist desirability politics waits to be used. But neither my eloquence nor my thought-provoking critique can put me through to the next round of

this talking stage.

It's true. I am 27-years-old, and as the popular trope says, *I don't have exes*. Only, in my case, it is not a trope. While I've been able to go toe-to-toe with my non-disabled peers since I was a child, accomplishing everything they did, making myself at home in the same ableist spaces they frequented, hell, even garnering the attention of suitors with near similar ease, there *is* a footnote to my story. It's a footnote that ever so gently, but acutely, reminds me that I am disabled.

It reminds me of when, on first dates, if I don't call ahead to advise the restaurant that I'm in a wheelchair, patrons must then move silently, pitifully to the non-wheelchair tables. When the only wheelchair-accessible entrance is in a back alley, it reminds me.

I wanted nothing more, nothing less. No allowances; no asterisk, no footnote.

*

**“Naye uyintombi lomn-
tana, Nolitha. Xa efuna
ukwenza izinto ezenziwa
ngamanye amantomba-
zana; into yokumhambisa
kwezindawo zabo, yinto
enganamsebenzi.”**

I had just purchased a luxury German car as my first. I was engulfed by hugs, congratulations and speeches from my family about how my success had always been guaranteed. I was 25-years-old and a young manager in an esteemed office, leaving a trail of glory and being introduced at youth conferences as *the* disabled voice to listen to. I longed for nothing, at least not to those around me. But there was something I had desired for a very long time.

I wanted a boyfriend. A real relationship. Much like the one my friends had.

I'd paid my dues and done the self-work, problematised my inherent beliefs and passed all the rigorous *Am I Ready?* tests. I'd self-loved myself to oblivion and manifested, chanting *I'm ready to take up space and cement myself in someone's life*. I'd even received the green light from my difficult-to-convince psychiatrist. So why were all my invitations to an ice-cream date always left unanswered?

People scoff at me when I say that this question literally keeps me up at night. A woman like me, who has everything, hinging her self worth on the fleeting validation of cishet men?

How ridiculous.

My non-disabled friends – serial monogamists or who are single by their own volition – and even the friends who preach that gospel of “wayekeni” [leave men alone], cannot relate to my romantic struggles.

Wayekeni, amadoda. Amadoda, wayekeni.

They'd never contemplated cropping out the wheelchair from their Tinder photos. They'd never worried that it might detract from the sexiness of their profile. They'd never abandoned the assistive device in case it warded off potentials. And they hadn't created secondary online profiles of a younger, aesthetically-palatable Thembelihle, sans assistive device altogether; a social experiment designed to expose this false conclusion, “The wheelchair doesn't matter to me”.

They hadn't hypersexualised or fetishised themselves online, trying to allay men's fears that disabled women couldn't be sexual in the way that other women were.

No, my non-disabled friends hadn't sought advice from disability support groups on whether to leave their personal assistant at home on first dates, a ruse to downplay the severity of their disability; to appear independent.

They hadn't, after being disingenuous and successfully hiding the disability, spent weeks typing and un-typing, calculating the best day and time, deciding on tone, all in which to finally, bravely, just admit that I haven't figured out who I am in this thing yet. I haven't figured out how to affirm that ability is not a measure of value. But most importantly, I haven't figured out how to articulate this truth: I am afraid of presenting myself to someone who will find me lacking because secretly, I think there should be more to me too.

*

Desperate for a promise of what could be, I've turned to the few successful relationships of disabled friends, but they've offered me little comfort.

Would I be enough when he'd decline group couple hiking dates? Would he risk his street-cred or manhood when other men couldn't relate to having to turn over their partners in bed? What staggering price had my disabled friends paid to have this “normal”?

*

I hadn't been in a night lounge since I lost the ability to walk. Then, I was at least 30kgs lighter and at home in the public gaze. Now, as the security guard opens both doors to let my red wheelchair in, I don't want to stand out.

The tables are too high for wheelchairs so I cradle the Grey Goose on my lap, protecting it from the drunk patrons who keep tripping over my footrests. Maybe I shouldn't be here but I tell myself that this is another one of my social experiments.

"Hey, I'm Lazarus. Sorry, I don't know if you noticed but I've been watching you from the bar." With a polite smile from me, he continues.

"You know, my aunt was involved in an accident two years ago. She was in a wheelchair for like, eight months? It was the worst time of her life; she couldn't do anything. Anyway, she's all good now, she's walking and everything."

"Oh, I'm glad, Lazarus."

"Yeah, so you will too – walk again. Don't lose hope."

The morning after a night out at Highlander, my grandmother sat on my bed, smoothing down my creased linen with worn hands, and asked, "Anidinwa mntanam, kukubuya ngobusuku?" [How do you young people do it?]. My mother, trying to pin her Young Women's Manyano red club, absent-mindedly complained about being my chauffeur.

But then my grandmother said something that I'll never forget. She reminded my mother, "Naye uyintombi lomntana, Nolitha. Xa efuna ukwenza izinto ezenziwa ngamanye amantombazana; into yokumhambisa kwezindawo zabo, yinto enganam-sebenzi" [After all, I too am a young woman, and that if they must endure discomfort for me to do everything that my peers do, then so be it].

But my mother doesn't need reminding, at least not anymore. When I look back on my childhood, I realise that it was my grandmother who fought for me to live the way my peers did, and this is the truth of what it means to be disabled for me: I owe much

of my joy to the advocacy of those who believe I deserve it.

I may have sat on the sidelines during social activities in my childhood. But perhaps the paradox that I live by – that *because* I am disabled, I must insist on normalcy, no matter the cost – has become my real undoing as an adult.

*

I was nine-years-old when my sister was born. Until her birth, my mother had not had to imagine what my life might have looked like if I was not born with a neuromuscular disease. My sister grew into a teenager, and my mother was confronted with this realisation: her eldest daughter's disability would never allow her the experiences – selection for first team Netball, sleepovers at friends – of her younger sister.

My mother's anxieties about exposing me to people who she thought would be burdened by my disability became pernicious.

Her realisation turned to guilt, and overcompensation became the burden of this guilt.

*

It was the final primary school dance, and though no one knew, it was my own last-ditch attempt at being embraced by the boys at my brother-school, at being normal.

What if you involuntarily fall on the dance floor and everyone laughs at you? What if you can't dance? What if no one asks you to? But the only thing my mother could actually say out loud, was a resounding "no". I simply was not allowed to go.

It was my cousin, my own kind of fairy godmother, who begged her. He negotiated with her; even volunteered to do my chores every day for the rest of his life.

An hour was left, and although I wasn't wearing a tiara or blue gown, I was still there, grinning from the shoulder of the only boy who'd dared to ask me to dance.

*

My mother now welcomes the men who fetch me in her driveway. Just like that now-forgotten Friday night in 2006, I still hope I'll make it just in time to fulfil my unknown desires. These pick-ups are becoming more frequent; seeing happy, albeit non-disabled couples on my Twitter timeline has reignited my resolve to date.

"Come inside the yard, it'll be easier for me with the wheelchair."

My mom is the designated orientator. She exchanges pleasantries with my date and ritually begins the crash course. First, how to help me into the car. She makes sure that he follows my directions on where to turn when we stand together. He appears determined, but this is foreign to him, and he lets out a nervous chuckle. Next: removing the footrests and folding the chair. He's surprised at how easy it is. Finally, he must properly position the wheelchair so as not to obstruct his rear view.

It's probably the last time she'll ever see him. After tonight, I'll grow tired of willing him to view me as more than just his cool homegirl, like I did the last five times I went on a date the same as this one.

"Are you okay? I noticed that your hands are shaking."

When I tell him about my persistent tremor, which indicates neither nerves nor fear, my reflex is to search his face for a sign that this is becoming emotionally laborious for him. I assure my date that he'll get used to it. I desperately hope that he believes me. Maybe I am nervous, nervous that I must now be smarter, funnier, more witty, all so that his hard work is worth it.

What has characterised my dating as a disabled woman, at least one that is Black and fat, is always feeling like I must assimilate. I share only the most

palatable aspects of my disability, or I latch on to any attention I receive, even if it's from undesirable and abusive men. Or, I know I must be more than *just* disabled.

This is not unique to me. Too often, the burden of finding a partner for disabled people means buying affection, morphing themselves, chiselling parts of their disability to fit elusive constructs not designed for them. In the end, they are rendered "too disabled" to be chosen; for acceptance, for love.

These "too disabled" women are the same women who are languishing outside of the healthy, affirmative and nurturing relationship spaces frequented by their peers. They remain in the wings, waiting for a cue that never comes, unable to admit to their mothers why so-and-so no longer picks them up.

So, they'll exhaust themselves writing think-pieces like these. Coddling "we-all-have-disabilities"-ass men. They'll pretend to accept the same disappointing answer reserved for disabled people: *maybe it's just not your time yet*. Maybe they're trying too hard; maybe the fault is with them for not loving themselves enough or valuing a man's validation too highly.

We'll unpack normative womanhood and homogenic gender expectations ad nauseam, bargaining our bodies for the attention we would otherwise never keep. We'll continue to preamble direct messages with manipulative "I'll understand if you're not interested. It can be overwhelming", guilt-tripping people into falsely admitting that it was our disability that turned them away and not our problematic politics.

We'll embrace emotional and sexual abuse. We'll welcome it as a rite of passage, as part of our journey to a promised land.

Wayekeni

A Re-imagining of
Black Love

OWETHU MAKHATHINI

Love is profoundly political. Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth. - bell hooks

This is a piece about love. Black love, and why, now more than ever, we need to have a sobering conversation about how it's killing us.

*

If Black women were free, the whole world as we know it would collapse. We live in a country that is quick to take and slow to give. Black women the world over are seen as mules for the world in every way imaginable. If it isn't fashion and culture, it's child-rearing and home-making. We are everyone's everything and left with barely anything for ourselves. And yet, we thrive. We form stokvels and book clubs just to breathe, just to be seen and validated. To pour into ourselves and one another with an ease, urgency and gentleness only a Black woman can.

In the tradition of the women in my blood, I resent men. Women in my family have not been

seen, validated or helped by the men in their lives. Seldom did I hear my aunts ask for help (financial or otherwise) from their children's fathers. Instead resources were redistributed among cousins, an old dress became new when passed down, school uniforms were hemmed and adjusted, unused stationery found new owners etc. there always seemed to be enough. The women always made a way, and whether the men left by cruel circumstances or the finality of death, the women began to bloom in the shit men had left behind. As a young woman growing up I observed the women in my family get along with their lives without centring men. Or so I thought. I learned later that men do not need to be present to colonize a space. I clearly saw that men do not need to be physically present to be centred or catered to. This is what this essay is about. This is the starting point for me, a young Black woman, to figure out how to identify all the ways in which patriarchy finds its hooks into my skin, my body, my pussy, my life, and how to suck out its poison,

unapologetically. Permanently.

In *Living While Feminist; Our Bodies, Our Truths*, Jen Thorpe states the importance of noting the ways in which we are infiltrated, “institutions can trap us” and how those same institutions can make us “trap ourselves” while reminding us about “the importance of our hearts”. I think it is particularly significant to make mention of our hearts. Often when we talk about ideologies that shape our lives we over-describe our lived realities, losing nuance and context. It is important to have the language to describe our lives but be careful not to think of ourselves as one dimensional. We are complex. We become nothing more than agency-less political sites where policies

“In the tradition of the women in my blood, I resent men.”

dictate who we are and how we exist in the world. I wish to focus on the heart, on love, on intimacy. The quote that shapes the direction of this essay pushes me to examine how political love is, and the inevitability of a revolution. Not just any revolution but a deep one. The soft squishy space that condenses everything we wish to be and represent. Everything we wish to be associated with. Everything we are running away from.

Statistical and anecdotal evidence shows us that Black femmes are being murdered at unprecedented rates. In South Africa, Stats SA defines femicide as, “The intentional killing of females (women or girls) because they are females.” We are being hunted down by the people in our communities who are best positioned to keep us safe. It is a patriarchal understanding of power to assume that men, by virtue of their gender, are the ones who should keep us safe. By best positioned, I mean people in our communities who are in community with us. bell hooks has said that “All over the world, young males and females, schooled in the art of patriarchal thinking,

are building an identity on a foundation that sees the will to do violence as the essential way to assert being.” According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) 12.1 in every 100 000 women are victims of femicide in SA each year – a figure which is over 100 times worse than Italy despite their “state of crisis”, and five times worse than the global average of 2.6.

Unsurprisingly, the real murder rate of women is even higher as a result of not every case being defined as “femicide”. When we include other factors (according to the South African Police Service), we see that there are 15.2 female victims in every 100 000. By those calculations, a woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa. Sisekakeni.

Ultimately, we all have a responsibility to keep each other safe. As Black people, we are all very aware of how the world seeks to subjugate us whether it is by institutions, like the church or the state or others. It is devastating that these harmful dynamics are replicated in our communities. This leads me to investigate the dynamics that exist within romantic and or sexual relationships we seek. If you are a cisgendered woman in search of, and, or, within a relationship with a cisgendered male, you are actively participating in patriarchal dominance. This ideology is a tributary of white supremacy. And every heterosexual relationship is the site of it. Queer relationships disrupt cisgender norms in real time by virtue of their existence, but this does not mean that the ugly head of patriarchy never rears its head. How people are socialized, how people identify, how people behave in a micro or macro sense is inevitably influenced by Kyriarchy. What does this mean then for a young woman like myself looking to love and be loved, fully and deeply by a Black person? Is it even possible at all to be in love in a way so radical that it can be defined outside of the heteronormative definition of love in the first instance?

Relationship anarchy as a framework

Andie Nordgen’s philosophy on relationships says “Relationship anarchy is not about never committing to anything- it’s about designing your

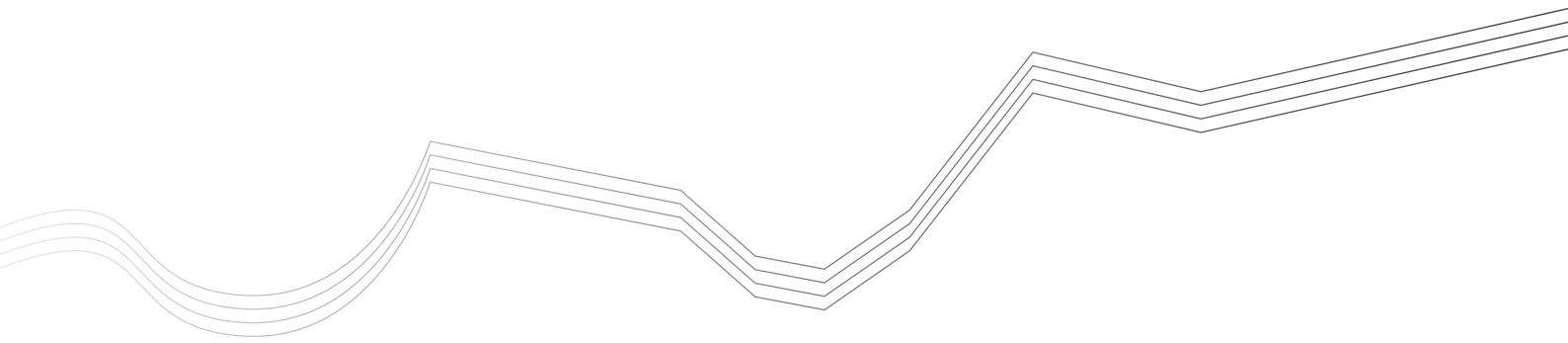
own commitments with the people around you.” Although the term “relationship anarchy” can be credited to Nordgen, I first saw this practice with the women in my own family, women who aren’t defined by the presence or absence of men... Women who have agency and options (although limited) stood as upright as they could in what Melissa Harris Perry calls the ‘Crooked Room’. Harris-Perry describes the Crooked Room as “a room skewed by stereotypes that deny (African American women) their humanity and distort them into ugly caricatures of their true selves. She talks about how race and gender can distort rooms into irregular shaped environments and how much harder it is for Black women to navigate these rooms without distorting into ugly caricatures. It seemed to me, as a child, that men were inconsequential. Bills were paid, kids were made and life moved on just the same. Men seemed to be an addition, if that. It wasn’t until I was coming into my own version of feminism, one I now know to be called Africana Womanism, that I began to see the insidiousness of patriarchy still. The clothes I should wear, the subjects I should study, the way I should sit all mattered to a man I hadn’t met yet. “What would your husband think if you xyz”. I have not met this man yet and already his invisible hand was disrupting my life. Here was isandla sesithathu guiding my decisions from the ether. Colour me unimpressed. Who is to say I will get married and who is to say that the person standing at the end of the aisle will be a man?

Incel: misogynistic online subculture, a portmanteau of involuntary celibates. Characterized by resentment, self-pity, entitlement to sex and endorsement of violence... I don’t think it would be a stretch to label South African men as incels. What is commonly referred to as ‘CBD Twitter’ shows us a small insight into the network of forums, WhatsApp groups and other online content that foster and embolden extreme misogyny, and later, violence. South African crime statistics make this plain. A ‘Chad’ is incel slang for a confident attractive man who has plenty of sex. This sounds like what is called a ‘Grootman’ in South Africa. A ‘Stacey’ is

the female equivalent which sounds like how the term ‘Slay Queen’ is weaponised against conventionally attractive women in South Africa. The late Karabo Mokoena was dehumanized by this term on social media and in the news so much so that men were emboldened to share how desensitised they were to her death. As we know, she is not the only one who has suffered this fate. Young boys are aggressively groomed into misogynist content. For example, there is what is known as the ‘gold digger prank’ videos that breed contempt and entitlement (= violence). These are the men we are expected to love and be loved by. These are the men who occupy powerful positions in schools, churches, and the government. This is the lot we are dealt in South Africa.

According to ‘Relationship Anarchy Basics’ (<https://goodmenproject.com/gender-sexuality/relationship-anarchy-basics-jvinc/>), “Relationship anarchy consequently creates equality of all personal/ intimate relationships, behaviourally and emotionally. The freedom to interact and value one’s relationships starting with a blank slate, distributing physical intimacy, sexual intimacy, emotional intimacy, etc. according to one’s desires rather than pre-existing rules and categories of relationship types, is an expression of this equality”.

bell hooks’ thoughts on this mirror my awakening precisely. She said, “Young girls often feel strong, courageous, highly creative, and powerful until they begin to receive undermining sexist messages that encourage them to conform to conventional notions of femininity. To conform they have to give up power.” I don’t know about you but the idea that I have to give up the little power I have in society in order to be with a man enrages me. A romantic relationship is not more important to me than a deep friendship. One simply does not take precedence over the other. As a Black woman it is almost impossible or unimaginable to untangle love, desirability and the performance thereof outside of the cultural and patriarchal lens. In doing research around these views I came across an ideology that captured my feelings as they are at the moment. This is not



to say this is how I will feel in a year or five or 20. Right now, this is what makes sense. “Relationship anarchy is a lifestyle, a way of doing personal relationships. Relationship anarchy is a philosophy, specifically a philosophy of love. A relationship anarchist believes that love is abundant and infinite, that all forms of love are equal, that relationships can and should develop organically with no adherence to rules or expectations from outside sources, that two people in any kind of emotionally salient relationship should have the freedom to do whatever they naturally desire both inside their relationship and outside of it with other people.” (<https://goodmenproject.com/gender-sexuality/relationship-anarchy-basics-jvinc/>)

Devaluing and decentering men is feminist praxis to me. Being able to step out of the bubble of Pick Me-isms and make decisions that benefit us as women is a practical and necessary step to take in my humble opinion. According to Relationship Anarchy Basics “A relationship anarchist begins from a place of assuming total freedom and flexibility as the one in charge of their personal relationships and decides on a case by case basis what they want each relationship to look like. They may have sex with more than one person, they may be celibate their whole lives, they may live with someone they aren’t having sex with, they may live alone no matter what, they may raise a child with one sexual partner or multiple sexual partners, they may raise a child with a non-sexual partner, they may have highly physical/ sensual relationships with multiple people simultaneously (some or all of whom are not

sexually and/ or romantically involved with them), etc.”

Relationship anarchists recognize that no behaviour is inherently romantic, and the only behaviour that is inherently sexual is actual genital sex. What determines the nature of a given act is the individual’s feelings behind it. Intimacy is a deeply political space and our desires reveal plenty. As such, I am divesting from the tyranny of heterosexual romantic love. Patriarchy has corrupted and dominated love in a way that harms and stunts Black women. I am exhausted by the narrative that harm is an inevitable result of being in a relationship (with a man). My love will no longer be used to heal and retrospectively atone for the sins of others. I am becoming unburdened.

Blessed am I to be loved
In the temple of my own skin
My nappy centre kisses the sun
In harmony divine
Devoid of the ugly
That does not know this as God
“Sisters”
Lebo Mashile

If Black women choosing ourselves is seen as a betrayal, call me Judas and put silver in my hands...

Vutha!

Raging Conversations with African Feminist Solidarity

MBALI MAZIBUKO

[I must apologize if what I present here reads as academic masturbation, sticky and disconnected in some places. But my offering is a reflection and conversation with/ in myself. My offering is a legitimate rage.]

Rage, to me, is an ethic¹. Rage is a political and moral inclination to act, to mobilise and to stand in solidarity. Rage is an invitation to purposefully and radically recognise that the world and its men, with their violent masculinity, inspire an undeniable rage within. To use that rage, as a historical and political location is to put yourself in a position of readiness to stand in solidarity with African feminists, women, queer, gender non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Rage is an indicator of resistance and readiness to respond to the call to action. Raging, then, as it moves beyond the descriptive boundaries of rage (adj.) implies that we are always in motion (v.). Standing together (n.). Moving together (v.). Vutha!

My reflection departs from my Master's dissertation on rage, loss and laughter in protest action against sexual violence in South African universities and how these affects exist online². There, I memorialise three very politically and now historically significant feminist interventions and responses to sexual violence. I specifically think through the silent

protest under the #RememberKwezi in 2016. This silent protest led by four Black women on a live broadcast of the electoral results for that year memorialised the woman we have known as Kwezi, the late Fezeka Kuzwayo, and rape victim-survivor who reported that she had been violated by former president Jacob Zuma in 2005. The rape case is known as the Kwezi-Zuma rape trial that concluded that Zuma was innocent. I also consider the naked protest under the #RURferenceList and the naked protest at Wits University held in solidarity with the two former movements mentioned. Here, I want to invite us to think critically and reflect on an ethic of rage for solidarity. Or at least, what I want to do here is to share my experience with feminist rage and how I have come to accept it as productive for African feminist solidarity and collective action. In this essay, I read and assert the #RURferenceList as ethically and politically anchored by rage. And while I have never been a student at the university currently known as Rhodes, this specific movement, following it and standing in solidarity with it, helped

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“What place does rage have inside me?”

to carve out space for me to confront the rage within both the (my) individual(ity) and the collective sisterhood of contemporary resistance.

*

At my previous workplace, where I was a research intern, most of my colleagues were Black men who were also in academia. When I first started working at this research and teaching center in 2018, I had just submitted my Masters dissertation. Remember, mine was on rage, loss and laughter as texturing protest action against sexual violence. So at the time of my entry into the world of work, my research was still something I spoke about and referred to constantly. Generally, I have not been shy to speak about rage and raging as both personal, political and collective protest repertoire. For the most part, the work environment I was in was progressive and provided space for me to express rage as an embodied practice.

While there was a small (and in hindsight, it really was small and maybe even disingenuous) attempt to engage what I meant by rage as ethic, many of the other moments where rage was referenced as a ‘brand’ of mine were misused. For example, just because I advocate for rage as a legitimate response to sexual violence, I did not sign up to be spokesperson of gender-based violence. In another instance where we had casually been talking about sharing wine after work hours, a male colleague would respond, in a tone they probably thought was casual and humorous, that I could tag along if my rage would stay behind. I was introduced by colleagues as Mbali and “feminist raaage”, and “yes”, followed by laughter... “Banter, you say?”, “Vibes nje?”, “Whoo sham!”

So yes, I sometimes felt that my colleagues undermined the serious nature within which I took and embodied rage as a form of resistance

and motivator for solidarity. And perhaps I am misreading some of their responses for ridicule. Maybe I am projecting. But what I know is that some of their responses to my rage and the ways they referenced rage as unique to my personal project often felt like I was being ridiculed and undermined for doing and thinking about feelings and emotions. I’ve considered that these feelings could also be exaggerated by my general suspicion of men but then I return to myself and remember the significance of my intuition: what is said and held and communicated by my belly, down there, is often guiding me to (a) truth. Do not doubt your intuition, it will give you courage.

I am writing this to re-learn and reaffirm my rage and yours. Like Danai Mupotsa (2008: 97), “I attempt to articulate an unnameable rage within”

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What place does rage have inside me?

In what ways does rage hold my feminist inclination to stand in solidarity with disenfranchised people?

*

On the 17th of April 2016, a list known as the reference list with the names of 11 men who had sexually violated women from the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR) circulated online. Men were named and shamed by their victim-survivors. I remember first learning about the reference list on Twitter. Two days later, what started off as a list and a hashtag culminated into a naked protest. By the 19th of April 2016, well into the protest programme, women who were students at UCKAR shut down the university and stripped in naked protest.

If you followed the #RURreferenceList at UCKAR, you would have noted that university management and some members of our society questioned the actions of the women who were students at UCKAR. A provocation that often came up was around whether there was a ‘better way’ within which women at UCKAR could have exposed the

rape crisis on campuses. Those who believed ‘the law’ was the only way to address the rape crisis challenged the legitimacy of the reference list and the naked protest.

“Why don’t they just open a case with the police?”

Social media was particularly difficult for me to navigate around this time because while other feminists and I hold each other and feminist activism in love and compassion, UCKAR and the #RURferenceList brought out in me, in more pronounced ways, rage. The actions of these women, their courage and their rage (adj.), unlocked a very real, tender part of me. My rage was directed at the fangs of patriarchy, the rape apologists in the ANCWYL, African universities and their hostility towards women, the realities of victim-survivors of gender-based violence and feminists, Jacob Zuma supporters, our failed (in)justice system, criminal defense attorneys, MEN. Today, Black women like Yolanda Dyantyi who were activists in the #RURferenceList have been expelled from the university for life. The consequence for being a Black woman, a feminist, a back-chatter and challenge to systemic violence is social death. The consequence for a perpetrator of GBV is..?

Yhini na?

Inzondo engaka.

Inkohlakalo.

Kungani?

Yoh ha.a. Senze njani uma singavuthi?

*

We often try to negate negative feelings like jealousy, bitterness and rage because they are perceived as dangerous and resulting in ‘irrational’ behavior. Well, a reading of rage in this way is true in the context of men who embody and celebrate their violent masculinity. We have all heard and seen the statistics of femicide. At different moments, we have been those women too. We know that we have reason to fear men because they are jealous and bitter and enraged when we no longer want them or reject them. But the rage embodied by the women student activists of the #RURferenceList

movement has taught me a productive rage; a rage for solidarity. If we are warned against rage, being enraged and raging, because of what we are capable of doing when we are raging then we are admitting that raging is a doing word and a call to action. We are also admitting that by suppressing our rage, we suppress our potential and power. This rage, our rage, keeps us sensitive to and aware of the prevailing systems of power that violate us as African women. Feeling and mobilising around rage makes clear the insidious ways within which patriarchy works.

So I sit with myself, the angry Black woman-come-raging African feminist. I come to realise that the trope of angry Black women is sometimes, and most times, not a trope but rather, a very real and legitimate and rational identity. My provocation and reflection is perhaps more than that of the angry Black woman. In light of #RURferenceList and my personal engagement with rage as it exists inside of me, is that the raging African feminist may use rage as a political motivator for solidarity but also as a political critique of the conditions under which we live as historically and continuously marginalised people. Rage, as an intensification of anger, has offered me an opportunity and a more honest lens within which to name and call out the source of our insubordination: patriarchy, power, privilege and its entanglements with coloniality and capitalism. What we feel and what we experience individually and as gendered people is a deep hatred and rage. How is it that the rage given to me, to us, is illegitimate and irrational?

I do not have strength in me. I do not think it is strength or some mystical resilience that brings us to African feminist solidarities. It is power that brings me here. And it is power that will get us out of this. There is power in rage also.

¹ See also African feminist and companion text, Mupotsa, S. Danai (2008). ‘This Little Rage of Poetry/Researching Gender and Sexuality’ in *Feminist Africa*, Vol. 11, No.4.

² Loss, *Rage and Laughter: Texturing Protest Against Sexual Violence on the South African Campus and its Existence Online* (Mbali Mazibuko, 2018). Also accessible on: <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27384>

The Mother Nature Trope

White Saviourism
in Climate Change
Activism.

AMANDA MOKOENA

Before I begin this discussion, I think it is important to position myself in the discourse and assume my authority as a scholar and author, but also acknowledge my subversions as a black African woman who grew up in a small village witnessing and experiencing the kinds of oppressions only black continental African women can resonate with. I came to the environmental sciences out of necessity and a keen inclination to the outdoors. I grew up in a small town in the Eastern Free State (Oos-Vrystaat during apartheid) called QwaQwa which was created to contain Sesotho-speaking black South Africans. I am a second-generation South African whose parents were both born and raised in the Kingdom of Lesotho, and the granddaughter of a political escapee from Lesotho who fled the country circa 1976 during the civil war. I understand dispossession and displacement intimately through my grandparents' experiences and, more importantly, value the role of the natural physical environment for people like

us. Natural landmarks, the stars, and natural food sources played a direct and fundamental role in the safe passage of my family from the oppressive Basotho regime into South Africa. Themes of the spirits in the rivers and the majesty of the mountains, attributed to a Mother Nature, have been in my conscience since birth and the older I got, the more I realised how exploitative these beliefs were and I could not help but reconcile that oppression with femininities, and by extension, womanhood.

I enter this discussion filled with residual misunderstandings of womanhood in the context of environmental studies. These misunderstandings are fuelled by the fact that the only way African women are featured in the debate on climate change and the natural environment is as the victims of the harsh impacts of climate change; we are often pictured with buckets on our heads and captions that speak of the long journey we have to travel to access drinking water, or as the beneficiaries of a water well built by some Western saviour. Our

role in global climate discourse is being the sites of data extraction, and we are not seen as credible sources of sound knowledge beyond that, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. As the nurturer and caregiver, the mother to me signifies oppression and exploitation, and in referring to the earth as “Mother Nature”, it becomes evident that the same extractive forces that subjugate women also distort the natural environment and glorify “her” degradation as a motherly sacrifice.

Mainstream media is finally admitting that the climate change discourse might be gendered and racialised in problematic ways. Thrusting young climate activists into the global political discourse has unearthed the inequities in the way we speak of and relate to the natural environment. This has engendered a sense of community across the world as the youth grapple with which mitigation and adaptation efforts can secure safer and sustainable futures for them in the age of sustainable development and neo-industrialisation. However, these discussions are as exclusionary as any global effort towards climate change, prioritizing mostly European voices, with Greta Thunberg as the global face of the movement. While this has been lauded as an example of young people from “all walks of life” coming together to save the earth, the earth is not the only subject of white saviourism. The automatic assumption of leadership by European activists in denouncing practises that disproportionately harm low to lower middle-income countries like Wanjiru Wathuti’s Kenya and Vanessa Nakate’s Uganda stems from the age-old colonial thinking that Africa needs saving, and that white people must take it

upon themselves to save us. This, despite our obvious capacity to create African solutions to African and global problems.

There is no decolonial and truly intersectional discussion about climate change without us borrowing from the lifelong philosophies of feminist scholars like Wangari Maathai and Bina Agarwal and their contributions to the environmental movements in Africa and India. Global climate activism privileges the scientific dimensions of climate change over

lived experience and the inequalities fostered by the effects of climate change in low to lower middle-income countries. This activism removes the critical value of indigenous knowledge from climate policy-making and disregards any reality that challenges the validity of scientific research as the only legitimate source of knowledge on something as metaphysical as nature. Western

climate action has taken on an ideological stance over praxis. This is problematic, and feeds into the stereotypes of Western nations as the sites of knowledge production, while the Global South lags behind, waiting to be saved. This narrative is fundamental to activism and feminist solidarities of the environmental discourse where Western feminist and environmental identities intersect. This is because they believe women and the planet have a shared history of oppression; they are feminists because they denounce patriarchy and all gender-based oppressions, and they are environmentalists because they want to save the planet from human (male) exploitation. This brand of activism is

**“Natural landmarks,
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based on dangerous assumptions of identities and cultures.

Environmental activists are not advocating for the preservation and restoration of the natural environment because they care about the planet. It is tied to the selfish realisation that the earth's capacity to fulfil human needs is compromised, and the human superiority mentality to protect animals that are perceived as unintelligent and unable to look out for themselves. The movement is also highly anti-black and picks certain types of poverty to fight for, tied to an acceptable version of the poor person. It is, in essence, a group of predominantly white women who chose the lifestyle because they feel like they are standing up to patriarchy by 'protecting' whales and being vegan. They lack the theoretical frameworks necessary to draw up the links between sexism and the Anthropocene, hence their eagerness to back privileged white European activists telling politicians what 'third world' nation citizens have always known.

Like a good intersectional African feminist, I will draw on my personal experiences to show how political these assumptions are. By age five, I knew several herbs my grandfather would collect from the mountain. By age ten, I had already been introduced to my grandmother's complex spiritual linkages between the earth and those beneath it. By fifteen, I led my first trip to collect firewood from the forest on the other side of the mountain I had grown up believing was insurmountable. I had frequently visited my maternal grandmother in Lesotho, crossing over the mighty Maloti (Drakensberg Mountain) and the elusive Senqu (Orange River). I knew the power in these creations, and so did my cousins whose job it was to herd livestock for days at a time in the wilderness; completely bare and at the mercy of the elements.

Why then, is my university degree the only thing environmental scientists are willing to accept as evidence of my knowledge of these entities I grew up around?

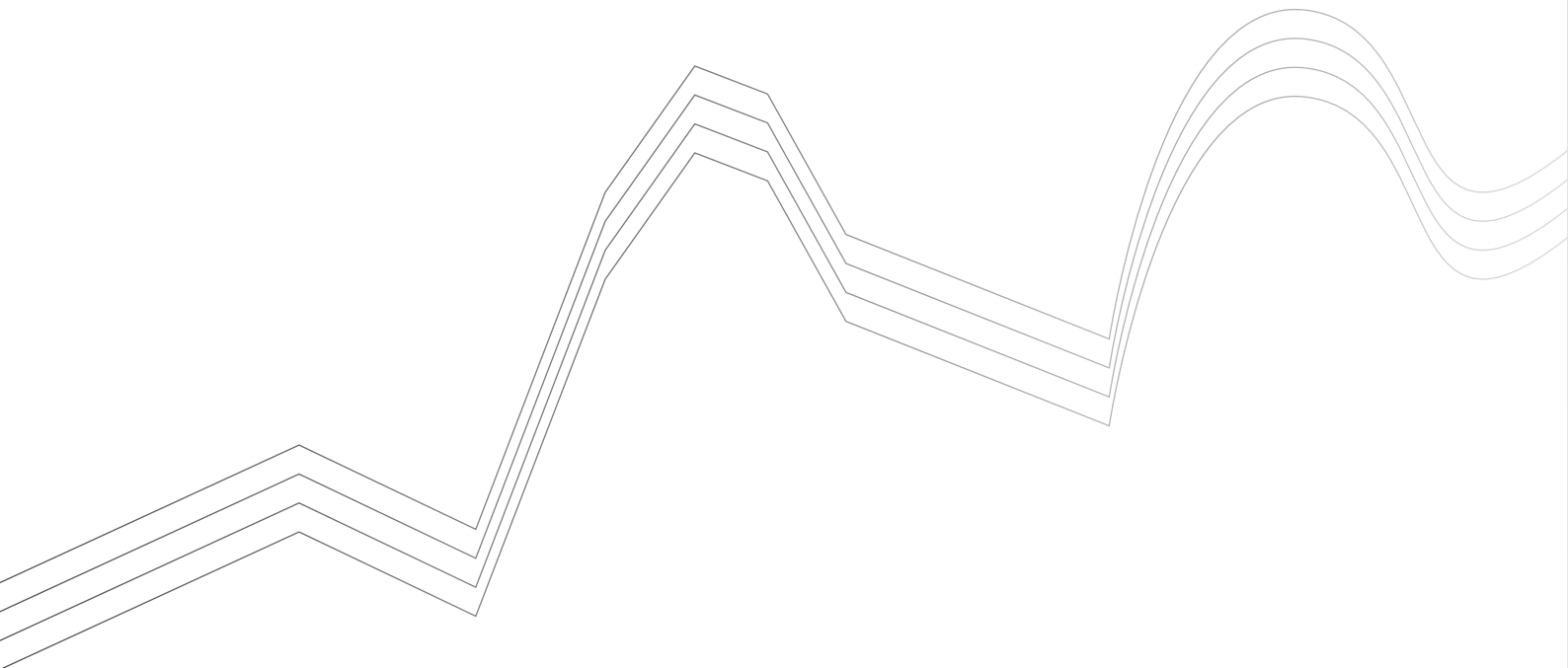
Is it because I don't know how to dissect frogs, or care about sea urchins that I am not an acceptable

environmentalist? I weave my African feminisms into my observations as an environmental scientist and I am yet to find a space in climate action where both my politics and expertise can exist. This means a willingness to evolve as frequently as it takes and experimenting with different aspects of both the scholarship and activism of African feminisms.

Why did I choose African Feminisms?

I wanted a feminism that was not a response to Western ideas of feminism. I also did not want a re-imagining of Feminism because I did not have Western life struggles or 'First World Problems'. I could not resonate with the call for equal pay because none of the women in my immediate family had jobs, so they could not complain about being paid too little. I could not relate to the need for women to choose whether, when, how, or with whom to have children because where I grew up giving birth was the only choice. I could not resonate with the fight for same-sex marriage because "real" men married the "good" women when they were done sampling all the girls in the village. Being vegan was not for the sake of the planet, or because we abhorred animal cruelty but because pap and cabbage were cheaper than any meat: we ate to curb hunger, not for nutritional value. So, no existing brand of feminism appealed to me until I came across African Feminism(s). Before then, however, I thought I was an ecofeminist because I liked nature and thought that, like women, it too was being exploited. Then I became an environmental feminist because I started studying ecofeminism and found it Eurocentric. Then I was a feminist environmentalist when I got my first degree in environmental sciences because I absolutely had to align the rest of my life with my education. Why else had I studied all those years?

This question of which brand of feminism I subscribe to is the decision I have been making since I first heard the word feminist. I think that by now, I would have found the definition that encapsulated everything I know and believe in if it existed. In this piece, I picked the aspects of African feminisms that I relate to and have attempted to weave an



alternative intersectional mess I call African environmental feminist thought. Citing some of my own encounters with rich reserves of indigenous expertise and knowledge, I posited that African feminists do have a place in the global production of knowledge about the natural environment and that our activism is concerned with climate change mitigation not because we are convinced by the sexist trope of the earth as “Mother Nature” in need of saving, but because the essence of our being is tied to the prosperity of the earth.

SA: A Crime Scene

An Essay

LUYANDA KHUMALO

Trigger warning: Rape, kidnapping, murder, homophobia, transphobia

Feminism was a stepping stone for how I viewed myself and other marginalised groups of people. Feminism was and still is a safe space for me to explore my sexuality and gender identity. I was 16-years-old when I was introduced to feminism. At first - I didn't understand why I had to be a feminist. To me, feminist thinking was already a constant and I considered feminism itself to be an unnecessary bashing of men. It wasn't until I was 17-years-old that I joined an after-school club where we spoke about our experiences as black girls going to a white girls' school. It was the first time I felt heard by my peers without being gaslit by others who didn't understand how it felt like as a black teenager who was possibly queer and possibly fitted under the broader spectrum of gender. It felt like a community where I belonged. This was also when I learnt about racism, misogyny, sexism and patriarchy. I learnt that these are systems designed to make marginalised groups suffer in attempts to achieve their set goals, systems that

others benefited from because of their privilege in society. I became intentional with whom I spent my time around.

I grew up very privileged. I've lived in the suburbs since I was about four or five years old and I always attended private schools. My hardworking single mother handed me a comfortable life on a silver platter. I wasn't aware of racism being a structure until I was about 16-years-old. The rules that were enforced by the school excluded black girls from them. Many of the black girls had to buy uniforms bigger than their sizes because we would be in trouble if our skirts were above the knee. Many white schools were and still are exclusionary towards black children, queer kids and trans kids. I was constantly asked to cut or restyle my dreadlocks because they were not a part of the school rules. Many other girls were in trouble for their afros, making them relax their hair or constantly straighten their hair while white kids were able to dye their hair without suffering any real repercussions. A lot

“I was nine–years–old when homosexuality was legalised in South Africa. At that time I didn’t know anything about queerness and gender identity. I didn’t know there was a possibility that I was queer and that I didn’t identify as a girl.”

of private schools failed to cater for black students and I believe this was their way to keep us out of their schools. The system was designed to make us fail and if we did succeed, we would be accused of cheating or having connections to help us out. We have always had to aspire to whiteness in order to succeed. Teenagers cannot choose between their sanity and rightfully fighting for a safe space to learn. Im still recovering from years of racial targeting by my school teachers.

Being as feminine as possible was something that was drilled into us. I hated anything associated with femininity and womanhood because I subconsciously knew I wasn’t a girl. I didn’t aspire to get married or start a family. I acted feminine as a survival tactic and I also acted as straight as possible because of the religious setting we were in. I had to learn and unlearn a lot about what I thought femininity should be and what masculinity should be. It’s only now that I am starting to let go of femininity and masculinity and define my gender identity according to how I see it fit. Out of 186 countries, South Africa is ranked number four on the list of most dangerous countries for women and

the LGBTQIA+ community. Black women and the LGBTQIA+ community have been at the forefront of fighting for our equality. These groups have tirelessly demanded inclusion inside spaces that were made to exclude black people, black women and black queer and trans individuals.

On the 9th of August 2020, it was the 64th anniversary of the women’s march to the Union Buildings where Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophia Williams-De Bruyn, Motlalepula Chabaku, Bertha Gxowa and Albertina Sisulu lead 20 000 women to abolish the apartheid system and specifically the dompas system. Sadly, I cannot celebrate the 9th of August as a joyous occasion because of the yearly “we need to do better” messages from men who refuse to call their friends out whenever they are in the wrong. Almost every month we hear new stories of women being kidnapped, raped and murdered. It’s the same story every time: the government condemns the act, makes an appearance at the deceased funeral for their political gains and then they return to their comfortable homes and repeat the cycle.

From the time they’re born, women are taught to cater to men. Misogyny and patriarchy plays a huge role in how women are allowed to present themselves. Women always have to be submissive, quiet and work towards starting a family and getting married. Men have felt threatened by women who don’t aspire to marry or start a family soon or even at all. I thought about the women who fought in apartheid and how they were barely mentioned in films, interviews and text. Men were seen as the saviours of the liberation while women were portrayed as only wives who stayed at home and looked after the kids.

Rape culture upholds patriarchy and heteronormativity, which makes it difficult for victims to report their perpetrators. Many victims of rape do not report the crime due to a fear of persecution from their family members, community as well as friends. There is a lack of trust in reporting to law enforcement because most of them are perpetrators of sexual crimes. Rape culture is not a post 1994

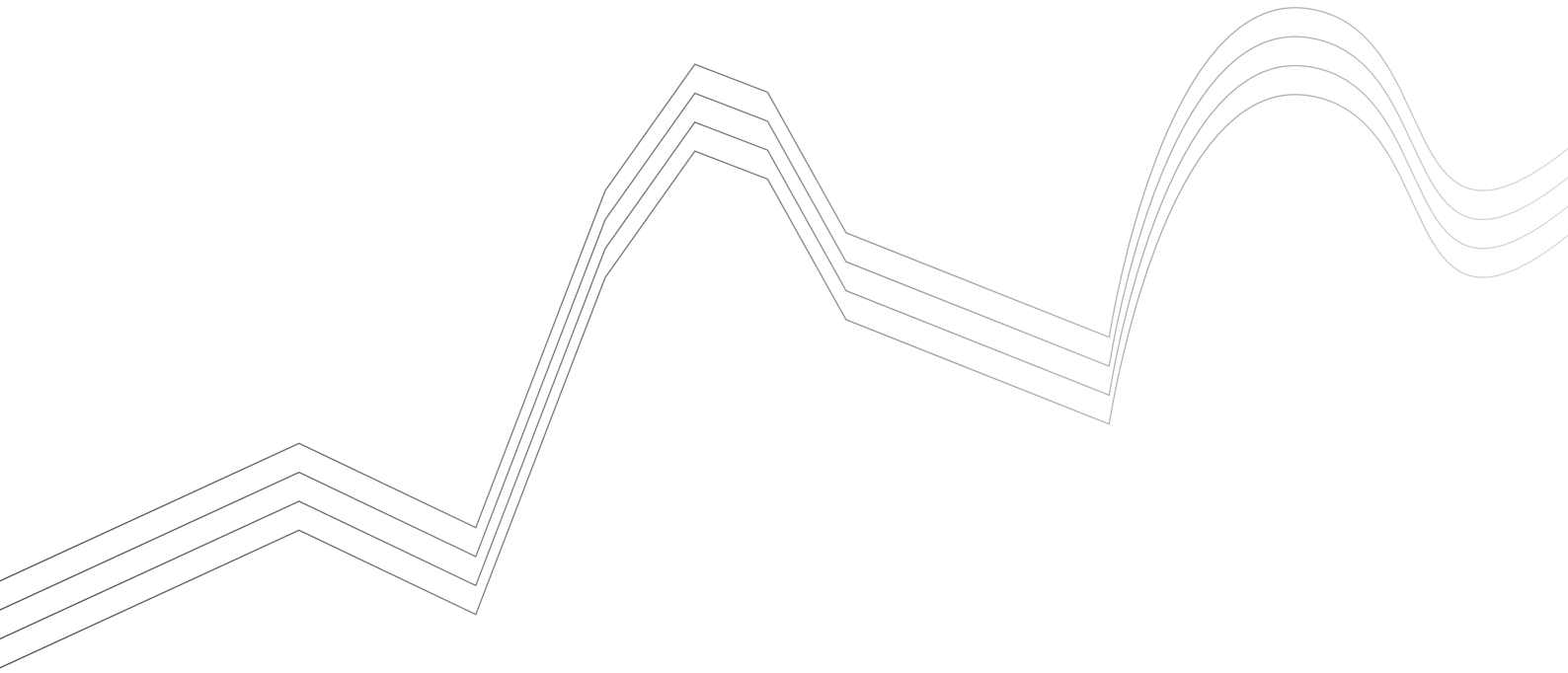
occurrence. It has been a part of our society since colonization. In Pumla Gqola's book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, it is said that rape statistics rose post 1994 because black women started reporting their perpetrators. In Apartheid, black men were hung if they had raped only white women. Black women from the townships and villages were seen as sub human, which played a part in men getting away with rape. This narrative continues today. Although South Africa was the first African country to decriminalize homosexuality in 1993, nothing much has changed to keep the LGBTQIA+ community safe from sexually violent crimes and murders. Many perpetrators rape queer and trans people to "fix" or "cure" them. Perpetrators want to exert their power by raping women who "act" masculine and men who "act" feminine. Television shows such as *Home Affairs* showed the lives of several women who have been harmed by men they knew. It was (and still is) a reflection of what happens in our society.

The portrayal of women in media is always them desiring marriage and a family, even if they have successful careers. One example of seeing women as a damsel in distress are Tyler Perry's films. All of his films have one storyline in common: a single woman has a successful career and is seemingly happy until she bumps into a man. She instantly falls in love and as soon as that happens, everything that could go wrong, goes wrong. The woman cheats and falls ill with HIV/AIDS, which already adds to the stigma of the illness. The woman ends up dying alone or moving back home with a ruined career while the man moves on untouched. A lot of his stories touch on homelessness and abuse and although those issues are real, Tyler Perry tells those stories in a negative way and I think that's his only way of staying relevant. Tyler Perry's storytelling is full of trauma porn that glorifies abuse as well as the stigma against HIV/AIDS.

I was nine-years-old when homosexuality was legalised in South Africa. At that time I didn't know anything about queerness and gender identity. I didn't know there was a possibility that I was queer and that I didn't identify as a girl. I always enjoyed

playing with the boys and sports associated with masculinity. I also enjoyed drawing, painting and anything associated with femininity so I never knew where I fit at school. It wasn't until I turned 21 when I learnt about different gender identities. I grew up in a household where all our chores were shared equally amongst my cousins and me, with the exception of mowing the lawn. This is my earliest memory of what feminism means to me and I credit my mother and late grandparents for instilling equality in that sense. I didn't know it was a form of feminism until my late teens and early 20s. Growing up in that environment helped me see the world differently than my peers from early on.

I was 12 when I think I realised I was queer. It was only when I turned 21 when I realised that that was the first time I realised I was queer. I went through my preteens, teenage years and early adulthood asking myself why I didn't like boys as much as I like girls. I remember forcing myself to like men who had six packs because my friends and peers were gushing over those men. Secretly, I would be gushing over black women like Kelly Rowland and Janelle Monae. I didn't tell anyone until I was in Matric when I came out to my best friends. I was relieved until I experienced my first homophobic act from someone who spread a rumour about my friends and I. I didn't know how to act so I kept it a secret from my parents because I've never spoken to them about my sexuality. It was a traumatizing experience, especially since I had just come to terms with my sexuality. The second time I experienced homophobia was in my final year of studying at film school. I had sex for the first time and I excitedly told my friends about it. It was with a cisgender man and all my friends were excited that I finally had sex. One former friend asked if I was suddenly straight again. I looked at her in confusion before telling her I was still queer. She laughed at me and she did it again a few weeks later. I cut ties with her after that. A lot of our mutual friends asked that I forgive her and I refused until she apologised. I was horrified at the ignorance displayed because most of her friends were queer.



I thought my experience with any sort of phobia was over until I realised my gender identity. I was the head writer for a school documentary we had to do called Ke Nna. We interviewed two black transgender individuals about their journeys with their gender identities. During the research phase, I realised how vast gender identity was and I found my gender identity. I am a genderfluid individual and my biggest obstacle is people misgendering me. For over a year, I've had to constantly correct people on my pronouns (they/them/their). I am at the point of not correcting people because they do as they please. Society doesn't respect anyone who don't adhere to the norms that have been placed to box people in.

As I've grown into accepting myself as a gender-queer person and what it means to me, I've found the concept of coming out unnecessary, simply because straight cisgender individuals don't do it. The world is made for cisgender straight individuals. Our lives are constantly made as a spectacle and as an example of who not to be. Media and

print play a large role in how queer and trans people are perceived. I watched a documentary on Netflix called Disclosure where Trans women were played by cismen and I realised how dehumanised the trans community is when it comes to media. Trans individuals are made to be seen as aggressive people and not individuals who are lovers and hard workers. Representation is important for many people who are black, queer and trans. Seeing black, Trans and queer people on television doing corporate work, doing medicine and doing anything mainstream is important for young kids who feel lost and alone.

Misogyny, patriarchy, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are systems that have been put in place exclude the people who aren't white, who aren't men, who aren't straight and those who don't fit the gender binaries. The world is forever evolving and society needs to adapt to the changes. Feminism has made me a better person and I hope I continue to evolve for the better.

Letter to My Rapist

JESSICA MANDANDA

Dear Rapist,

I have been longing for a conversation with you ever since that day when you came for me.

I can only assume that you had been watching me, that you had been planning your attack for weeks, because you knew where to find me, and I had only begun using that path less than two months before you came for me.

I never heard you nor did I see you until you grabbed my arm. I turned to see who you were, maybe to find a reason for your aggression.

Your eyes were dim and cold, lifeless. It was getting dark, but I remember what your eyes looked like.

Your grip was strong, it hurt. I'm sure it left a bruise, I do not remember,

You came for me, knocked me off my feet and literally took my breath away, because I could not breathe as you covered my mouth. Do you know how I remember that your hands were dirty? Because I can still taste the dirt in my mouth, the dampness of the ground you threw me on is a feeling that still makes my skin crawl. I had to burn my clothes that night.

It has been years now and my skin still crawls. You know, I still have glimpses of that day, I have blocked out most of it, but when I hear of your latest conquest, I remember.

You took that little girl the other week, remember her? Let me tell you a little about her because I doubt you even knew anything about her. She was eight-years-old, in primary school and she was a little girl who had dreams of being a doctor one day. She wanted to stay in school with her friends, play with them after school and be a free spirit. And then she met you. Or rather, you came for her. You came with your lies and your empty promises when you knew you had no intention of ever seeing through because all you saw was an object to be used for sexual gratification.

*

Tell me how you thought your five-year-old granddaughter would make the perfect lover? And how it felt to have your hands covering her mouth, holding her down as you soiled, ruined and bruised her? Can you tell me how she fought, clawed and scratched you as you tore into her body and left her bleeding? Knowing well enough that you were wrong.

Remember your neighbour's daughter? You lied to her, telling her that pleasuring you would make her a woman. Can you remember how old she was; at the least, can you remember her name? Do her screams keep you up at night just as your muffled grunts keep her up at night? Help me understand how you thought your actions were justified, and how you thought that her not consenting and saying no, her begging you to stop meant you could go ahead and defile her, go ahead and load all your fantasies onto her body.

Dear Rapist,

Do you know that since I was little, I have been constantly taught how not to get raped: how I should dress, how to speak and carry myself so as to not to be raped by the likes of you? How about you, what were you taught as you grew up? Were you ever taught about how to treat a woman? Were you ever taught that a woman is a human being too? Forgive my questions, but I need to understand you. Maybe then I can begin to clear the foggy mess that you left me with when you were done with me.

A Normal Pandemonium

KIM KHUMALO

It stopped stinging some time ago. I get unpleasant flashbacks of the first time he fixed his grimy mouth, running over with tobacco stained place setters for teeth, to call me a bitch. An ideal response, he thought, to my silence, scratching at the ego that delivered his advances. Rage. My clenched jaw forced itself open so I could try with all my might to squeeze all 1.8 meters of him into my fist and leave him as he had just left me.

Dehumanised.

It stopped feeling so cold weeks ago. I remember the exact moment that shiver went through me, for the last time and never returned. Maybe it was more, a bitter chill than a shiver: when she declared that being black and being woman brought with it a series of unavoidable destinies. From her broken view of these aspects of my identity, my hoop earrings were a sign of my commitment to journeying to slut-ville. And with a little more coaxing, my vagina would become the eraser to any aspirations I had.

Slut-shamed.

It has since stopped. Since I have stopped hating my physical weakness for not taking the back seat to let strength drive. That day when I hated my feet for having chosen the quickest way home. When

I looked up as their hungry eyes bore into mine, I cursed my day for having begun. His fingers nailed me through the wall, while the other's words hammered them deeply into my shoulders. My defiance, he said, is the reason why he would rape me right there.

Fucked up.

It stopped stinging, we made it stop.

I said, "I need to save face, I do not enjoy being the angry black chick and his smirk only further antagonises me." Absorb the frustration, you can take it.

I said, "That's okay, she's old school, she's just trying to protect you." Think of hoop earrings and sex as the hammer and chisel targeted at your goals, each encounter with these invites a whirlwind of guilt and fear.

I said, "Well, at least they did not really rape me, they apologised to my brother when he showed up, that has to count for something." Normalise the threat of rape, it will not keep you awake at night if you pretend it's okay.

It stopped being painful a good while ago, but I still catch myself picking at the scabs, wondering if it should be.



Umurage w'ibihangange twogeza, March 2020

Mixed media

By Angella Ilibagiza

The lips represent women's voices. Though it's been proven that to achieve equality, it is imperative to involve girls and women in the discussions because they (girls and women) know best which challenges they face in life, women (and girls') voices have been (and still are) too often excluded from national and global decision-making dialogues. However, there are fearless and bold women who have resisted and defied the norms. They have refused to stay silent. They have fought to voice their concerns and to be heard. It is true that when women try to enter spaces that were previously male-dominated, there's often a backlash to emphasise their vulnerability in society and to remind them of their place. These women have faced the backlash in the form of sexual harassment, humiliation, abuse and/or violence, but that never broke their spirit. Rather, they fought on relentlessly to give us the freedom and rights we now enjoy today. We stand on the effort, voice, sweat, tears, pain and blood of these women who came before us. History has not been kind to these women, discrediting their work or erasing them completely. It is our responsibility to celebrate these women, sing their praise, tell their stories and rewrite their history, and continue their fight and build upon their work to pave the way for the generations after us. A woman's voice and her ability to use it is key to empowering other women. Use your voice.

Fiction & Poetry

The World of the First Water

PULANE MAFATSHE

I was at this idiot of a man's house when I picked up Ben Okri's *Famished Road* for the first time. I never got to finishing that book that day because this idiot started to kiss me. It must have been the softness of his lips that deterred me, that's what I want to believe. Though I know that the two to three joints and the bottle of wine we got through before this moment might have had some influence. Off my feet I was swept. I thoroughly gave in. Our bodies began to dance in the moment. His kisses were soft but his hands or rather, how he used them, were rough. There was a thick air of uncertainty, but we were already there. I was to become the meal of that afternoon and in that moment, for the first time, it almost felt like he saw me.

It usually felt like I carried the curse of invisibility and I enjoyed it. Hiding in plain sight: everyone acknowledging my presence but never really seeing me. It's always been that way, ever since I was a little girl. I never felt worth being looked at, let alone being seen. There was always the cuter child, the

smarter, quieter, faster or even slower child. There was always someone that needed more, and I was the person to give it to them through sacrifices I never wanted to make. I was never really quite the exact image of something. I always had to fight for it or hide under the big red bold line of the margin. Not quite in it or outside of it but somewhere no one could really see. I mastered this with the help of low self-esteem, a dash of anxiety and sprinkles of depression coupled with PTSD here and there.

Oddly, I really wanted to be seen by this idiotic man and it broke me that I wanted this so deeply while he would explicitly rather not. He was not looking and was never intending to. Sometimes he looked past me and probably saw me hiding in the dark and ran. At times he looked through me, danced with my mind, left his footprint on my soul, became the rhythm of my heart. He never stayed long enough to dance in the next song. Most times he looked over me, forgot me, removed me, disregarded me. This hurt me.

Drunk from the spirit of jazz boys and poetry girls and cheap wine, we furiously danced that night. A little bit too furious for my liking but it was okay to me because he was literally looking into me. His beautiful big brown eyes were solely focused on me. A part of me was not even me. I was this hyper-visible being strutting her stuff on the dance floor in ways that meekly disrupted me. However, that was a small price to pay for finally being seen.

He asked, "Ithi ngiyfake kancane?" I consented on the condition that he wears a condom. He agreed and did the whole performance of wearing it in front of me.

"Ngcicela ukufaka ikhanda without icondom," he said to me.

"I don't think that is safe, please let's just protect ourselves with," I replied. He seemed understanding. I was relieved, but something in the centre of my belly was growling. He got tired and suggested we take a bath together. I thought that was incredibly thoughtful of him, notwithstanding the fact that I found it strange that we must do it together. Again the vigorous dance commenced. A dry, uncomfortable and unpleasant mess it was. This time our moves were not in synchronicity. It must have been the water. He splashed into my waters and I could barely gasp for air. I was drowning but he splashed in me over and over again. I can't say I didn't like it, something in me was okay with dying.

Into my womb something started forming. It felt like love, but the kind that leaves you deformed, depleted, deteriorated. I remembered that four months ago in those rattled waters there was something that moved slowly, swiftly, smooth into the rhythm of my calm. This idiot must have come in me. I did not recognise who was moving inside of me. I neglected it. I forgot about it but the famished road haunted me. I started changing, my mornings

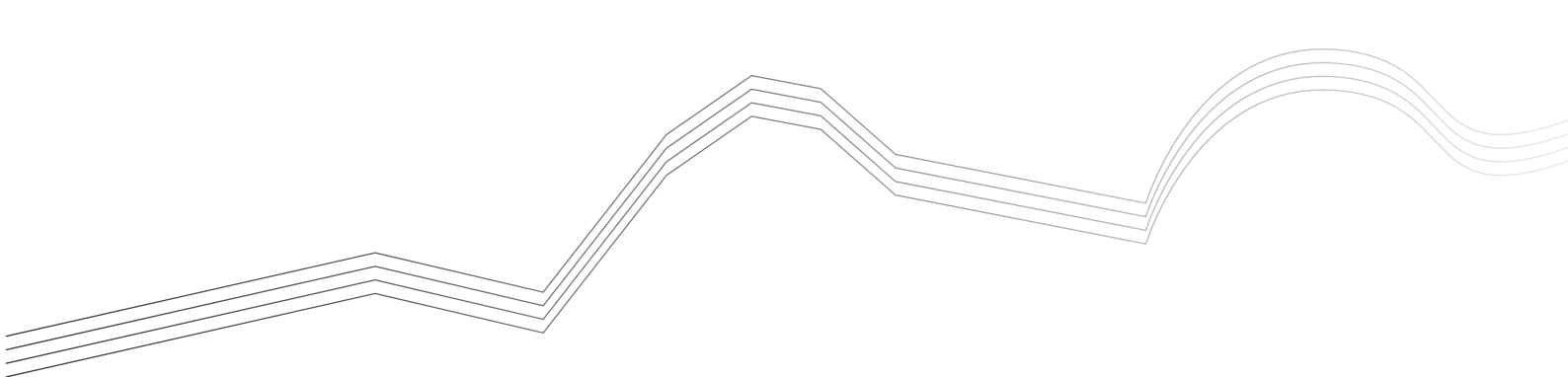
became more difficult as this love started to eat at me. I grew in size, my hair and nails grew longer. I had a suspicious beauty and it had been months since I had seen my moon's glory.

I did not recognise this love so I did not know it and I would not claim it. On a random day I was walking around the city and a strange woman who only I could see, stopped me. This strange woman with a round face whose skin is the colour of the sun, told me that water was filling up in my belly and that the beginning or ending of my world was forming in there.

"Mama you don't know me, you must have the wrong person. Please stay away from me, I don't know what you are talking about," I told her. But her words stayed with me and in my dreams this world became clearer and clearer. I saw this world pleading and begging me to take it back. It told me that if it lived I would never survive dry land. For my sake, it prefers to exist only as a spirit.

The next morning, I collected every cent that I had. I did not have that many so I reached out to other women that I trusted. They could not help. It was strangers, people that I had no idea could come through for me, that did. With the little that I gathered I ran to the nearest doctor. I knew it was late for the clinic, but I was hoping someone would bend the rules. I begged, please set me free from this. The doctor regrettably told me I was one week too late. This world was coming to join me. I was devastated. I spent days and nights weeping. Begging the stars to take this cup from me.

Time, in all its glory, was always right. Five months went past and the world inside my womb was ready to meet me. In a miraculously painless process of labour, a beautiful, bouncing baby was born. The reality of what that means set in. How would I survive this? I could not allow myself to carry another world. I asked for my options, I was



advised that I should start taking contraceptives in the form of an injection. I asked for the shot and the doctors advised me against it. They said something about waiting a while as I had just given birth. I did not have the luxury of time, between my own insecurities and the reality of the world around me, anything could happen and I wanted to be ready for it. They unwillingly gave me the shot.

I went home, feeling slightly ill but relieved that I had my baby and would not be getting another one any time soon. My sceptical grandmother kept probing “Khizo, why are you not bleeding?”. I didn’t have the answers so I ignored it. A week went by, still, no blood. My body felt as though it was filling up from the inside with this disappearing blood. I could not stay awake so I spent most of my time in the world of dreams. The strange woman kept visiting me in my dreams. She was telling me that my time was up. I now knew that not listening to her yielded unfortunate outcomes. I listened.

I begged to be taken to the clinic. Upon my arrival I was sent straight to the operating room. I don’t remember much from there; the next time I woke up I was no longer in my world. There were doctors and nurses huddled around a body and I desperately wanted to see. I looked out of the window, I saw my grandmother waiting anxiously, and I so desperately wanted to shout and tell her that there I was, and she simply could not see me. I wondered why these doctors did not acknowledge me. I began to worry, but the worry did not land in the way that I knew it would land in my body. Deep down I already knew what was going on but I had to be sure. I moved carelessly in between the doctors and nurses. I desperately needed to see what was going on, who was the body that was being worked on so hard.

It was mine. I had died. I saw my baby, helpless

in my aging grandmother’s arms. Who would take care of my child when she dies? The father only knew that he came inside of me. Not that the result of it was a living, eating, breathing thing that not only looked like him but belonged to him . My family invited him to my funeral and he did not come. They tracked him down. He first denied ever knowing me, let alone sleeping with me. A DNA test was demanded by my family as they had no other alternatives. He did not have a choice. The truth was about to burst open. He confessed that it could be his but also insisted that he did not consent to being a father as a result he would not be taking any responsibility. This man did not see me and did not bother to see his own child.

Two months later my grandmother died. My family had long made it clear that they would not be involved in cleaning up my mistakes. My child had nowhere to go, they would be sent to a children’s home. They would never feel the warmth of being loved by their parents, let alone family. They were to suffer forever. The strange women, clearer to me now in this realm, showed up. She came to tell me what I already knew. My child had begged to never make it to the world. They were never meant to be made in that water, let alone live in my first waters. Their life was ruined by being born. I pray that unlike me, my baby is not too consumed with wanting to be seen. I hope that they are content with the fractured image of their beauty. I hope they can forgive me for leaving and bringing them into this world. I wish they could understand that it was never my choosing and may she, with love, labour for those that look like her without that luxury. I wish them a life and future clothed in choices. May they know that they can unfold and unravel in any way that they choose.



Muhorakeye, June 2021

Angella Ilibagiza
collage

Muhorakeye is a Kinyarwanda girl's name that translates to "one who's always joyous". In traditional Rwanda, ceremonies and practices observed for men and women were discriminatory towards women. One such practice is the naming ceremony in which a baby boy is given a spear and shield to wish that he becomes a successful warrior and given names invoking bravery and courage such as Ntwali (hero), Shyaka (determination), Nkotanyi (warrior) and Rugamba (battle). A baby girl, on the other hand, is given a basket-weaving materials to symbolise good management skills in the homestead and then given names referencing their worth in terms of dowry to be collected in the future. These include Mukobwajana (whose dowry is equivalent to a hundred cows), Murorunkwere (admire/ look at her and pay dowry) and Zaninka (bring cows).

I Am Tired

AMINA DEKA ASMA

If only you had told me that your death would mean
a handing down of the baton.
I am not fit for this position, Mama.
You need to come back and resume your duties.

If only I had known that the same violence that I marched against
would one day enter my life,
then my sister's life, over and over again
– I would have shouted louder, raised my knees higher, cried harder.
Anything to derail this misfortune.

If only I was told that being a Black woman was going to come with
endless fatigue, hopelessness,
sleepless nights, a loss of appetite, neck and back pain, depression, anxiety
and a fear of men.
Maybe then I would have asked not to be born.

I would have begged my mother not to die.
Begged her to stay alive to help fight off all the bad men that have
made me a victim
made me a statistic,
the men who ignited my paranoia and
violated my mother's daughters, over and over again.

But this is the reality: my mother did die.
My mother died and the baton was passed onto me.
I was violated, and so were my sisters.
I marched against violence but that wasn't enough
to keep me safe or afford me peace of mind.
I can't sleep, I can't eat.
The depression is back,
and the anxiety never left.

Loves the
Moon
or Basadi
or Tokollo

KHOLO THELEDI

the women are comfortable with their bodies here.

they spread their limbs as far out as they will go

and I marvel at them.

they stretch their legs

wide

like a silver protractor advancing from 30 degrees to 60 degrees and then from 60 degrees to 90

degrees until finally, finally they reach 180 degrees

they extend their arms, too

starting low at their sides, caressing their firm thighs

and then raising them up to their shoulders.

from here,

they look like eagles

and then up their arms go, high up to the moon

“celestial beings?” they must be.

with their legs spread go tloga Lephalale all the way to the Nile

and their arms raised high up into the heavens,

they beckon to me:

“etla, Moratuwa, etla

come, worship with us; we have been waiting for you”

and instinctively, I begin to weep

because seeing

their erect spines

their regal necks and

their liberated limbs reminds me of how early I learned not to assert authority over my own flesh,

because I do not yet know what such

r-e-l-e-a-s-e feels like,

how it feels not to have to fold myself ko spaza ko kerekeng ko kamoreng,

how it feels to not have men pull, and punch, and poke this here skin

and so,

I worship with the Women.

raising my arms go tloga Lebowakgomo all the way to Monrovia

and spreading my legs from the Atlantic to the Pacific

and, of course, I stretch this bridge, this bridge that I call my back

Tokollo! Tokollo! Taba ya Semaka

Papercuts

GORATA CHENGETA

Ritual:

A handful of women,
their hands clutching placards,
a stage appears wherever they stand.

As they bellow the man's name,
their tongues thrash into him like paper cuts.
Though they cannot sever his hands,
for bursts of time,
they arrest him in his own truths,
and torture him with its memories.

It is so heavy to raise one's voice – arm – fist.

For each placard,
there are armed men trained to contain things.
For our testimonies,
there are defamation lawsuits and press releases;
chameleon words awaiting immediate release.

We know there are costs.
We learn how to move between silence and survival.
For our memories to outlive us,
we learn to read time in ways that muzzle urgency.
To protect our truths, we code them in rumour
until they steal a moment like this
and catapult out of our mouths.

“We will not sing his praises.”

We, the embodiments of inconvenience.
We, the repositories for fallism's debris.
We, the anointed killjoys.

We will not be silenced forever.

Screaming into histories and futures,
We will tell them he is a rapist.
We will return to the placards as ritual.
We will interrupt your theatre with our own.



Womanificent, March 2020

Angella Ilibagiza
Mixed media

Light bulbs represent knowledge and access to information. In today's era of technology, information is mostly on the internet. Unfortunately, for mainly economic reasons, the majority of girls and women don't have access to basic technology such as phones and computers, thus lack access to information. *The halo* represents magnificence and a safe space. A major barrier that slows and/or restricts girls' and women's entry and full participation in all aspects of life is the ever-present looming threat of harassment, abuse and violence, which keeps girls and women from attaining their full potential, thus restricting them from living their full lives. *The equality signs* represent equal access to resources, opportunities and rights. *Flowers* represent beauty and blooming. Women are beautiful. When girls and women are in safe spaces void of harassment, abuse and violence, with access to technology and information, and equal access to resources and opportunities, they bloom, and everyone witnesses their magnificence.

Several Poems By

TLHOGI SWARATLHE

The dead men of patriarchy

She said that after her husband flew the seventh punch across her left jaw, she rose to her feet and said to him:

“I almost wrote you a poem but wrote your eulogy instead.”

“What?”

“You’re dead, beloved, don’t you realise?”

“Dead? Dead?” He asked mockingly. “Who killed me?”

“Patriarchy killed you. But I refuse to be dead along with you, so I’m leaving”.

She said she’d been left a bit bitter that the elder women had only ever taught her how to be a good wife.

They’d forgotten to tell her that sometimes we’ll be good wives to dead men.

We're songs too big for their mouths

That's the thing about fearless women,
they terrify men.

And so they'll lie to us
and say we're hums when
we're songs too big for their mouths.

You matter

Black woman, you are a godly poem.
How dare the world try to write you otherwise?

I am a feminist, not mere ash.

Some households ask that you leave your shoes at the front door before you enter.

My friend's cousin asked that I do the same with my feminism.

Did he not know that my knees no longer knew how to bow down to the myth that women fall out of their mother's wombs to exist as mere ash,

and men the relentless raging fires?

And so I said:

"I am whole and finally do not know how to be otherwise, so I won't be leaving pieces of myself out on any doorstep".

"You are the kind of woman that men run away from, and hardly ever towards," he said.

"Then it is men that I will pray for the most at night," I said.

"Bitch," he said.

"Luke 23:34", I said.

"What?" He said.

"I said, Luke 23:34."

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do. Get to the point," he said.

Father, forgive them for they do not see that they have made warm homes out of prisons.

Father, forgive them for they do not yet see that it is the invisible shackles that are the deadliest.

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Gorata Chengeta is a researcher, teacher and writer from Botswana. She enjoys spending time with her friends, reading poetry, talking about ideas, and watching 'Grey's Anatomy'. She is currently working on a PhD at Wits University in Johannesburg. Her research project explores what care and support look like for people who have experienced sexual violence. As a scholar, her priority is to give emotions the attention they deserve. She is interested in people's narratives and in holding space for their varying experiences. Her writing interests include digital activism, archives and memory, feminism, activism, gender and social justice.

Angella Ilibagiza is a 31-year-old self-taught artist based in Kigali, Rwanda. Angella works primarily with collaging and her work focuses

on feminist, black womxnhood, wherein she explores themes like gender and violence against womxn.

Luyanda Khumalo is a 24-year-old screenwriter and director. She was born in Pietermaritzburg and raised in Pretoria, where she is currently based. Luyanda credits her parents and teachers for encouraging her to take art classes and attend speech festivals, where she won silver certificates. She directed her first play, an adaptation of Snow White, when she was 11-years-old. Luyanda majored in television screenwriting and directing. Since completing her degree in 2018, she has worked as a freelance screenwriter. She started her blog "Lulzin Thulzin" on the Medium app as an online journal and a way to challenge herself to write more than just scripts.

Kimberley Khumalo is a young and passionate Black woman from Tshwane, South Africa. She has an undergraduate degree and an Honours qualification in urban and regional planning from the University of the Witwatersrand. She has just completed a Post Graduate diploma on Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of Western Cape. Kimberley has worked at the City of Johannesburg Municipality as an intern in the City Transformation Department. Kimberley is a social justice activist, facilitator and scholar. She is currently working for a social justice movement called Equal Education as a researcher for national organising. She also volunteers at the Tshwane Urban Activist School and co-founded a women's discussion group called Sisterhood Screenings. She started writing and performing poetry in high school competitions and has since continued writing poetry and short stories for therapeutic reasons.

Andile-amantombazana Themba Madonsela, Setlogolo saba binna Tau, uMtimandze, uMbambolunye. Andile is an angry feminist who is driven by the idea of social justice. She is currently pursuing an MA philosophy degree in

Gender studies at the University of South Africa. She holds a BA Honours degree in Development Studies and a BA in Community Development and Leadership, both from the University of Johannesburg. She dreams of a world where women, girls and queer beings have autonomy over their own bodies, this is a dream she lives for and contributes towards achieving. If need be, it's a dream which she is prepared to die for. She is also an aspiring feminist author and hopes her writing will be a great account of the daily lived experiences of black women like herself and an act of solidarity. *Aluta continua!*

Pulane Nomzamo Mafatshe is a writer, singer and actor currently pursuing her Honours degree in Bachelor of Arts in Drama at the University of Witwatersrand. She received her first degree in Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg. In 2012 she was one of the winners of the Hansa Pilsner Competition where she performed alongside international acts such as Usher. While wrapping up her first degree in 2015, she took part in the 'Sing Off' competition where she and her singing ensemble Hashtag Amagagu came in fifth place. She is part of the 'Indaba Is' compilation that was released in January 2021 as a featured artist on iPhupho L'ka Biko's 'Abaphezulu' featuring Siyabonga Mthembu and Kinsmen. Her work in the literary space has shown up in various publications such as *iLiso Magazine* and *Culture Review Magazine*. Over the past years she has acted in 'Devil On the Cross' (2018), 'uNosilimel'a (2019) directed by Kgafela Oa Magogodi, and Prince Lamla Chilahaebolae (2020). She was the stage manager of a play in 2018, 'Vuselela', that went to the National Arts Festival and directed 'Rain of Knives' a play written by Mbe Mbhele which showed at the Wits orientation week in 2020.

Owethu Makhathini is a sangoma, writer, and entrepreneur. She is based in Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. Makhathini cares deeply and is guided by the principles of Love, Service and Justice. As an initiated spiritual practitioner, she also advocates for the integration of African wellness through intergenerational diaspora community building guided by what Christine Taubira said on "seeing Black, not as a singular

colour but a kaleidoscope."

Jessica Mandanda is a radical feminist, writer and poet. She uses her writing as a platform for expressing her passion for women and girl's liberation from the patriarchy, strongly believes in the feminist disruption of the status quo for women's freedom and chooses writing as her form of expression.

She is a gender and communications specialist with over three years in advocacy communications and programming. Jessica is a published writer with a passion for feminist activism, ending violence against women and girls and championing sexual health and rights. She is a GRO-GEST Fellow, Young African Leaders Initiative Alumni (YALI), Feminist Macroeconomics Academy Alumni and Country Coordinator for the International Youth Alliance for family planning and is also an Alumni of the African Women Writers Workshop.

Mbali Mazibuko is a 27-year-old researcher in the Institute for Gender Studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and a 2nd year PhD candidate in Women's and Gender studies at The University of the Western Cape. Her background is in Sociology of which she holds both undergraduate and master's qualifications in the discipline from Wits University. Her interests include work and research on gender-based violence, power, affect theories, feminist movements, protest action and popular culture. Mbali's doctoral research interest takes into consideration sexuality, temporality and embodiments of rebellious femininities as they emerge in popular culture and popular imaginaries. Mbali is an advocate for soft lives and soft landings for Black women. While she deeply belongs to herself, she remains actively connected to her communities as both teacher and learner.

Amanda Mokoena is an African Feminist, writer and aspiring scholar whose work is on the intersection of race, gender and the natural environment. Amanda's Master of Philosophy (African Studies) from the University of Cape Town investigated water inequality in informal settlements in Khayelitsha, and explored the broader

debates on the distribution of natural resources in post-apartheid South Africa through an environmental justice lens. With a background in politics and environmental sciences, Amanda is ideally located to highlight the links between gender, location and climate change activism as nations race towards sustainable development. Her approach is through interrogating the evacuation of particularly black women scholars' knowledges and contribution to environmental science and showing how, in failing to recognize diversity in African voices in climate change movements, conventional ecofeminism is working with and for the same systems of oppression it claims to be working against.

Thembelihle Ngcai was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 3 – a rare hereditary degenerative neuromuscular disease. She grew up in a family that taught her that there are no limits to her capabilities; it is this ethos that has defined her life. Thembelihle is a published essayist and speaker. Having grown up marginalised in school, she is an inclusive education advocate and a champion for the sexual and reproductive health rights of disabled people and their representation in pop culture.

A former Senate Committee Member for Institutional Transformation at Rhodes University, she has held inclusive education and workplace talks for the Eastern Cape Department of Education, Nelson Mandela University, South African Board for People Practices and McCain South Africa. She's a frequent guest on SABC's TruFM and has appeared on Newzroom Afrika, Channel Africa and PowerFM to discuss disability-related social issues. Her by-lines include *News24*, *Cape Times*, *IOL*, *The Daily Vox* and American-based blog *Herstry*. She is currently a Deputy Director in the Eastern Cape Office of the Premier.

Tlhogi Swaratlhe is a storyteller based in Johannesburg. She received her BA degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from the University of Johannesburg and went on to kick start her career as a researcher. Curious and creative by nature, she later transitioned to the advertising world to bring ideas to life as a copywriter. If she isn't crafting, you're mostly likely to find her glued to a fiction book, blowing off steam at the gym

or simply café hopping around Johannesburg.

Kholo M Theledi is a PhD candidate in the department of communication studies at Louisiana State University. Her research interests include African and Black feminisms, decolonial and postcolonial theory and criticism, and digital activism. Kholo is especially interested in Black women's digital resistance movements in South Africa and the United States. In her writing, Kholo explores not only how people are oppressed through systems and structures, but also how individuals and communities engage in creative resistance and create new worlds. She grew up in Atteridgeville, South Africa.



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