



**WSA**  
Writers Space Africa  
Empowering African Writers

# WHO AM I?

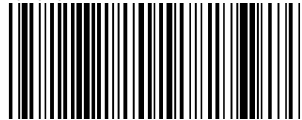
Lebogang Samson  
Botswana

# CHOICE

Heidi Last Motanyane  
Lesotho

# IDENTITY

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## **THEME: DEATH**

Writers Space Africa, a monthly literary online magazine dedicated to giving literary enthusiasts a platform for their work, welcomes submissions for her November 2020 Edition in the following categories:

- Short Story
- Flash Fiction
- Poetry
- Essays
- Children's Literature

The Submission windows is open from 1st of September to 14th September. Response time is typically within 4 to 5 weeks after submission window closes.

We look forward to receiving your best.

To submit, please visit [www.writersspace.net/submissions](http://www.writersspace.net/submissions)



# EDITOR'S NOTE

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**W**ho am I? What am I? These questions probably sound cliché, but that's because they have been around for the longest time, and to ask such questions is a rite of passage for all of us.

Identity is an interesting thing; it is dynamic in many ways and if we are not conscious of it, we miss who we are in the moments unique versions of ourselves are expressed. Are we defined by what we do or by the family we are born into or by the attributes we possess? How do we refer to ourselves in a room full of people? A mother and a diplomat, a friend and a husband, selfish yet caring, greedy and humble...

Today, we live in a world where the struggle of realisation is even more pronounced; the pressure to identify with a group or as something is so strong that many times, we live our lives untrue to ourselves. We are also caught in a place where we are critical of the identity of others to the point of hate and discord.

Who are we? What are we? Collective identity is just as important as individual identity; they are more intertwined than first glance would have us believe. Publius Terentius Afer, an African playwright in ancient Greece, once wrote "Homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto" which translates into: I am human, and nothing human can be alien to me. Dr. Maya Angelou said of this statement that we recognise bits of ourselves in other people and as such, allows us to be more understanding.

The writers in Identity speak to a search and discovery of who they are as individuals, and who we are as Africans.

On a personal note, I think to be one thing and one thing alone would be boring, but if I had to choose, I would be the most basic component of our existence: human.

Always remember, Ubuntu  
Warm regards,  
Nabilah.

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# CHOICE

**Heidi Last Motanyane**  
Lesotho



**I**n the bathroom, Lefa lets water run and washes his hands. He looks up and meets his reflection in the mirror. For the first time, it registers how handsome he looks. His neat buzz cut matches perfectly with his fine light face. He can see needle lines by his eyes, the inheritance from his father who got it from his grandfather and down goes the line. The men in his family have a long reputation of being players. A bonus to his success in popularity amongst girls. Yes! Indeed he is handsome. Surely

someone like him does not deserve to leave the game as yet. A man enough is determined by his ability to stay in the game, his grandfather would say.

“Are you going to wash your hands the whole day, Dude?”

Lefa closes the tap. He murmurs an apology as he rushes out of the bathroom. Since the beginning of the week nothing has been same at work. His colleagues have been avoiding glances with him and being jumpy when he tries to

create a conversation. He has never been a friendly person to start with. Everybody in this office is a computer freak and he hates the job, but his mother forced him to work with the promise of giving him a managing position in four months' time. But the news of his girlfriend being pregnant has really messed his life up. Even the fluffy spectacle-girl who sits by the door never throws him flirty glances anymore. He drags towards his chair and drops involuntarily. His minds drifts to the conversation he had with his father last night.

“What are you going to do with the baby, Lefa?” His father sat on the big couch in a spacious living room.

Lefa sat across him. They both had glasses of whiskey in their hands. He shook his head and took a gulp.

“Having a family is no child's play.” He continued, “...Look at your situation right now: working for fun, playing games every night and changing girlfriends like underwear. You cannot simply think you're up for the responsibility.” Lefa took the last gulp and put the glass on the set table. He stood up.

“You have no idea what you're talking about, Dad. Just because you feed off Mom's money doesn't mean every man in this household is useless. I do have my own dreams.” With that, he stumbled out to his room.

“I know you, Son. The men in this family are eaters not feeders.” His father called after him.

“Lefa?” The manager's voice echoes in the big room, making everybody look up. Lefa raises his head and sees manager waving him over. People now seem to recognize him as he passes. If it was on another occasion, he would drag his feet and irritate everybody with the noise. But

because of hushes and whispers he hears as soon as he passes them, he hurries away without looking anybody in the eye.

“Your mother is on the line.” Manager says. His voice as loud as if he wants to invite others in. Lefa ignores him and enters the office, and closed the door.

“Hello Mom, why did you call me here?” He sits on manager's chair and places his feet on the desk.

“I wouldn't have to if you had answered my calls.”

Lefa grits his teeth. He has been ignoring his mother's call since morning. Because of the dilemma, his mother was the last person he wanted to hear from. He can almost hear her fuming.

“Ooh, I put it on silent mode while in a meeting this morning.” He knows his mother is not going to believe him. Which meeting? He's only a minor who receives commands.

“What is it I hear about you

impregnating a girl? What did I say about you and your games with girls? Didn't I tell I don't want to see a poor girl at my doorstep claiming to have your baby?”

“Calm down Mom.” He places his feet on the floor and sits up.

“How can I calm down now? For Heaven's sake, you had to go and impregnate MaLucy's daughter? The biggest witch in the village?”

Lefa sighs. He knows the hatred between his mom and Lucy's mother. They have always spoken ill of each other. His father said the feud was from dating MaLucy before he married his mother.

“Can you not bring your hatred in my situation?” He hears her take a deep breath.

“You have two options. One: make that girl do an abortion and forget all this. Two...”

“What? She's eight months pregnant.” He stands up and starts pacing.





“Two: deny that the child is yours. I will stand by your side.”

“I don't believe this is coming from you. You always lecture me about taking responsibility for my actions. Today you're encouraging me to abandon my child?”

“If you had chosen another girl, it wouldn't have come to this. This situation is unacceptable.”

“Mom!” A lump forms in his lungs and tears pile up in his eyes. Even if he has not made a decision, he had hoped that his mom would surely stand with

him if he decides to take Lucy and the baby.

He hangs up the phone and sets out of the office. People shuffle around as he appears at the door. Obviously, they have been listening. But he decides not to care. He walks to his desk and sits down. At the situation like this, he would normally just take his backpack and leave, even if it's still 11am on a Wednesday. Spending a day at the bar drinking has never been a problem for him, but he prefers company of his buddies. He takes out his phone and texts in WhatsApp Group.

“Anybody up for a drink?” He waits.

“Not me. But I'm in if there's a meet-up for AFCON semi-finals tonight.” Khotso types.

“I'm also in for tonight. Who's bringing drinks?” Thabo replies.

“I will. With meat.” Lefa sighs and sends the message. Another message enters and he slightly jumps up when he sees Lucy's name. Reluctantly, he opens it.

"Your mom wants nothing to do with me and my family. Here's my question to you, are you in for this baby or not? If not, don't come to me after it's born. Never try to be part of its life."

"Can we talk about this later?" He sends the text.

"I don't have later in my schedule, Lefa. We had seven months to figure this thing out and you kept ignoring it. I might have a child any day now. I need your decision before he arrives."

More messages from Lucy. Lefa puts the phone down and stands up to the bathroom. He opens the tap and lets the water run. He looks at himself in the mirror. Somehow, he looks quite different from the image he saw earlier. He now has few lines piling across his forehead. His younger sister likes to call them worry lines.

"Worry lines are for responsible people like mom and me. As for you and Dad, Playboys like you don't fret over things."

These words always make Lefa sad. But he acts as if he doesn't

care because that is what is expected of him. His fine and light face now looks sissy: a man who will never grow out of his mother's care, even if he will marry one day. He will force his wife to work for him, claiming that he has opened opportunities for her to run a big family business.

He splashes the water on his face. He shouldn't have to be like his father and others before him. It always breaks his heart to see his mother working hard and giving the money to his father. It is not the life he would enjoy living for the rest of his life. And it is definitely not the life he wants to keep witnessing. The door opens and the man from earlier enters and gets in the toilet. Lefa turns off the tap and heads outside, water still dripping his face.

He checks his phone and finds

"Why are you not answering?"... "I see you must have already made your choice to ignore me. Well, have a nice life Lefa."... "You know, I seriously thought you were a man capable enough to make right decisions, I see I was wrong. I will never bother you anymore."... "One last thing, you

are a sissy boy."

Lefa laughs at the last message and types,

"I will see you tonight. I will be there for our child. And for you, forever."

Just as everybody starts going out for lunch, Lefa puts down his phone and looks up at the sheet of tasks he has to do for the day. With the way things will be now, his pay should be deserving and meaningful. He is creating the new him in the old sissy Lefa.

# THE WRITER'S SPACE

**Leo Muzivoreva: THE OBSERVER**  
Zimbabwe

**A**s people in general and Africans in particular, diversity is our strength, culturally, politically and economically. Pathways to such an aspirational goal are fraught with difficulties to overcome and our history is littered with such examples. Our indigenous peoples illustrate our past and still current inequities in the provision and defense of basic human rights. In 2015, Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, gave a speech in London, United Kingdom, titled Diversity is Our Strength, stating that "Canada has learnt to be strong not in spite of our differences but because of them, and going forward, that capacity will be at the heart of both our success, and of what we offer the world," he said. The prime minister continued: "We need to acknowledge that our history includes darker moments: The Chinese head tax, the internment of Ukrainian, Japanese, Italian Canadians during the First and Second World war, our turning away boats of Jewish or Punjabi refugees, our own history of slavery." That series of lapses in our intention must also be contrasted with those successes where our aspirations have—and still do—bear fruit. Ta-Nehisi Coates, a formidable Black American intellectual and commentator on the lived experience of Black people of African descent, in a foreword to Toni Morrison's *The Origin of Others* in 2017, talks about the wish to belong. The book itself is about themes of race, borders, vast movements of people, what motivates people to construct others, and the use of terms, such as racial divide, racial chasm, racial profiling, racial diversity, "as though each of these ideas is grounded in something beyond our own making." We created such categories of race then underpinned our labels with layers of declared knowledge, facts, theories, that were designed to confirm the humanity and worth of the creators of such alleged knowledge at the expense of those allocated to the labels. The invention of differences between ourselves, and the imposition of values placed upon such variance, has a purpose argues Coates and is developed further by Morrison. What is generally accepted as the meaning of being part of a cultural group and there being a cultural gap between yours and another is not as clear as one may think. Culture is one of many groupings we may align ourselves to voluntarily or be assigned to by others. Essentially, what is needed foremost is a clear vision incorporating what we wish to aspire to, and to whom we wish to belong to, together with reasoned understanding of why we are together. True belonging in a diverse,

equitable and inclusive society—the Dream as espoused by Justin Trudeau outlined earlier—means being treated as equal to anybody else. Having similar opportunities to aspire and achieve what you set out to claim. Having no imposed restrictions that fetter development based on spurious notions of origins and perceptions of difference. Acknowledging that due to societal constraints those with imposed restrictions to acquire the tools necessary to achieve identified goals, are given the opportunity and the resources to possess them.

Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail stated that “all men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

This connection, this co-dependency, is difficult for some thought-leaders and decision-makers to understand and accept, let alone work to deliver on. Novelist, playwright and activist

James Baldwin understood this by advising us that as Black people of African descent, “Our energies should be devoted to understanding the way that a country and its society works. How to find my way around it, not get lost in it, and not feel rejected by it.” This demands that we have



an awareness of our context-identity, the social location within which we are currently and the impact it has upon us. The next step is to work out how we can forge some sort of approach to deal with it. Our sense of belonging is conditional, reliant on how we play our cards. We

decide, we choose, weighing up the pros and cons of how to play this, at times, lethal game. I did not become part of the Writers Space community by choice. Someone introduced me to someone who then introduced me to Writers Space. I really want to thank the founders for creating a space where something like this could happen to somebody like me. Writers' Space is arguably an imagined community. An imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*, to analyze nationalism. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. The media also creates imagined communities, through usually targeting a mass audience or generalizing and addressing citizens as the public. Another way that the media can create imagined communities is through the use of images. The media can perpetuate stereotypes through certain images and vernacular. By showing certain images, the audience will choose which image they relate to the most, furthering the relationship to that imagined community.



As Anderson puts it, a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”. Members of the community probably will never know each of the other members face to face; however, they may have similar interests or identify as part of the same nation.

Members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity: for example, the nationhood felt with other members of your nation when your “imagined community” participates in a larger event such as the Olympic Games. Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that

has made it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much as to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

There you have it, by virtue of being here, you are part of the space. You are welcome to expand the comradeship by sharing this post, following the site and telling your friend to tell their friend about this imagined nation.

# GOMEZA NEEDS YOUR HELP

**Nabossa Dianah**  
Uganda

**G**omezza is a happy girl but she is often confused. Her four older siblings won't stop teasing her, they say she is very light-skinned.

The confusing part is that Gomeza's classmates often tell her she is very dark-skinned, and they sure do make fun of her dark skin. Please help Gomeza know if she is dark or light-skinned.

Gomezza dislikes vegetables, her mother says that's why she is thin. They say she is the thinnest in the family, with the smallest bed, the smallest shoes, the tiniest clothes, and she's the one to be carried on the lap while in the family car. Her siblings keep telling her that by her age, they had all already put on some good weight.

Another confusing part is that

Gomezza has five best friends at school and they say she is fat. "Gomezza, you're the fattest among us, you take up more space on the desk!" they complain. Gomezza gets confused again, "Am I thin or fat, someone please, help me know what I am!"

Gomezza is not a TV-fan, she prefers to play with her five friends. She loves to play a whole lot, which makes the teachers complain, "Gomezza is as playful as a puppy." Yet Mama Gomezza keeps worrying, wondering why her little girl is too quiet. Maybe it is because Gomezza has no age-mates to play with at home.

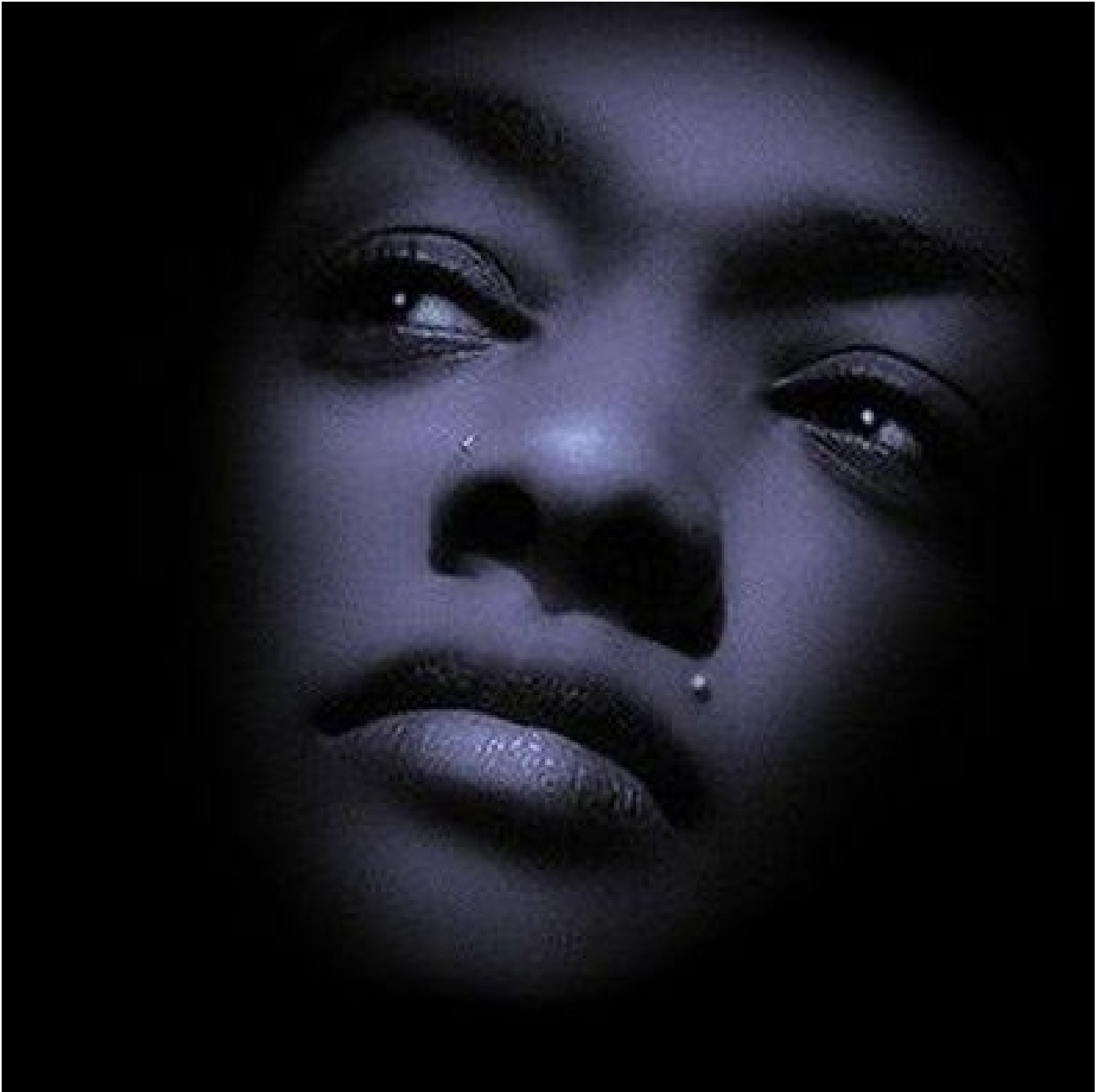
One time, Mama Gomezza argued with a teacher who had complained about Gomezza's playfulness, "I know my little girl." Mama Gomezza said, "She is very quiet and humble, she won't move an inch if you don't

ask her."

Gomezza needs help, is she playful or not?

Sometimes Papa Gomezza argues with Mama Gomezza. He suggests they cut off Gomezza's hair, they both think it is some big coiled trouble. But Mama Gomezza doesn't want her little girl to have a bald head. Problem is, most of Gomezza's classmates find her hair cool. Many of them wish they had hair like the one Gomezza has; she can't get her friends to stop touching or playing with it. Gomezza needs to know, is her hair really cool and fun, or is it indeed some big coiled trouble?

It is frustrating to be like Gomezza, not knowing what you really are. But guess what is not frustrating or confusing: choosing to be a good person from the inside.



Both Mama Gomeza and the teachers agree that she is a kind child, she loves to help others. Gomeza is a generous girl, she loves to share with others. She respects her elders and she is very hard working at the same time, improving her grades every year and helping Mama Gomeza with the housework so that she

doesn't get too tired.

All of us, just like Gomeza, might be the shortest person in a certain crowd of tall people, but the tallest person in another of short people.

Still, you might appear to be the darkest skinned person among light-skinned people but at the same time the most light-

skinned person among dark-skinned people.

You might not be able to choose one side in every place, but you can choose to be kind, to be helpful, to be respectful in all places. Choose who you want to be on the inside, that will not change no matter where you are or who you are with.

# TEAR OFF YOUR MASK

**Marita Banda**  
Zambia

**A**s little girl growing up in Lusaka city, I often used to hear about the Nyau, masked spirit dancers. The tales were terrifying and were used to keep us, the children, from mischief. However scary the stories were, they seemed like a far-fetched idea from my reality, until one day I came face to face, unexpectedly, with these fast-moving grotesque-looking monsters. I could not run fast enough. I peed in my pants.

In the Netflix movie, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, we get a few glimpses of these masquerades during the funeral rites of an elder. Nyau are members of a secret society among the Chewa ethnic group found in parts of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. The art of masquerade is a worldwide phenomenon and exists in every society. It is all about pretending, hiding and concealing of true identities by using a form of cover-up. The year 2020 will go down in history as a



time when mass masking, for health and hygiene purposes, in public places across the globe became mandatory in many countries.

Our identity is a primal part of who we are. Identity is what sets us apart from others as individuals or a collective. When we are born, one of the first things that happens is to be given a name, which many carry to the grave. Some along the way change their name or acquire new identities by choice or circumstance which becomes their new way of being addressed.

This may happen by initiation through a rite of passage such as baptism in Christianity or for many women, they acquire a new name by marriage.

From the foregoing we have established already that identity is not static. Sometimes the labels may remain unchanged but the physical appearances, mental states and consciousness of our being are constantly evolving because of circumstances, experiences, time and place.

Throughout recorded history, mankind has had a need to mask, both literally and metaphorically, thereby presenting a false identity to the world.



Focusing on the metaphorical part, this assumed identity is supposed to make one appear 'good, conforming or normal.' It comes from a fear that has its basis in what is known as the 'Myth of Inadequacy' in psychology. Presenting our true and honest selves to the world can be a very vulnerable act, which many avoid for fear of rejection and/or abuse.

The truth about the reality of life is that everything in the universe has its particular unique signature that cannot be replicated. No two snowflakes or raindrops are alike. We all have our specific fingerprints.

At the core, we are all spiritual beings having a human experience in the body. We are made up of mind, body and spirit. The mind is made up of the will and emotions, while the body is matter (our physical expression) and the spirit is our eternal self. In our wasted efforts to be seen as 'normal,' we deny ourselves and the world of our amazing, beautiful and awesome signature. Maya Angelou put it succinctly, "If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be."

You are not your body, your name, your talents, your nationality, your religious inclinations, your

marital status, your possessions, your profession, your achievements, your accolades or any of these tags that you acquire by virtual of your human experiences. Who you are is far greater and humanly speaking unfathomable. This does not mean that one has to renounce these things because the paradox is that if you deny or reject these aspects, your signature is incomplete. By all means reach for them. Remember you are here for the human experience of creative expression. You are worthy of all your desires and expressions.



Many societal institutions, particularly religious and educational ones, hardly encourage overt manifestations of unique character and behaviour. Our teachers tell us, 'Colour within the lines,' and we heed. Of course this discussion is not referencing malevolent expressions that denigrate others. Individual signature expressions are many times a threat to the patterns that have been set and upset the proverbial cart. Many rules, regulations and doctrines are a control mechanism used to suppress and make many wrong for simply not conforming. Followers, especially of religions, are held captive by making them subscribe to senseless superstitions and ideas.

Think about your own life. How many identities do you have? Which ones are the real you or are they all masks? In his book, *The Mastery of Love*, Don Miguel Ruiz talks about how every individual has created personal mythologies about their life. These mythologies are populated by various entities including angels and demons, heroes and villains as well as kings and commoners. Further, we construct for ourselves multiple

personalities which we project to others at different times to suit our specific point of attention. We become masters of the art of pretending.

In this life, it is the bold and the brave that make a difference. But they never have it easy. They have to come against many obstacles and often, their contribution to society is only acknowledged after they are gone. Some, sadly, end up committed to mental institutions or committing suicide because they cannot stand the pretence. Others yet become deviants as they find it easier to have a negative outlet for their expressions because they have been made to feel wrong anyway. For the majority of humanity, we settle for 'normal.'

We realise early on in life as children that being a good girl or boy is the most important thing as we don't want to offend or disappoint our parents. Our creative harmless mischief is nipped in the bud. Experts say toddlers, 18 months to 3 years old, hear the word 'no' an average of 400 times a day from their parents or caregivers. This message translates that they are not good enough and invalidates their humanity. At this point the mask games begin.

Our identity, which the world sees, is a collection of masks and often we are not even aware because we have become so adept at pretending, the masks come on automatically. But who are we without them? Only you have the answer. Rumi, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian Sufi mystic advises and rightly so, "Tear of your mask. Your face is glorious."

Let me end with a quote from Emily McDowell, "Finding yourself is not really how it works. You aren't a ten-dollar bill in last winter's coat pocket. You are also not lost. Your true self is right there, buried under cultural conditioning, other people's opinions, and inaccurate conclusions you drew as kid that became their beliefs about who you are. 'Finding yourself' is actually returning to yourself. An unlearning, an excavation, a remembering who you were before the world got its hands on you."

Go on now, let the world behold the magnificent signature expression called you.

# AFRICANISM

**Abigail Basse-Tydale**  
Nigeria

Africanism will not die  
now, later,  
never,  
while history and tradition live together

this kinky hair of mine  
just as that person's blonde  
is lovely  
on its own,  
on its people.

So, enough of people whispering;  
'What relaxer do you apply to your hair?  
Only curls make you look classic.'  
None of my children would know where I come  
from  
if even the hair of my head is a false identity.

Colour  
is the only way  
you can differentiate  
a Black man from a White.

I am Black, too.  
I have pride in where I come from  
just as you do.

# WHO AM I?

**Lebogang Samson**  
Botswana

They say...  
I am a Motswana,  
Originally from Botswana  
But it doesn't mean we'all Tswanas.

Telephonically, I'm British  
I imbibe my Afrikana with delicacy  
"Scottish!" a few conclude; my copper skin...  
Certified copy of an African,  
My figure - AfricanTswana origin.

Rumour mongers...  
Of Malawian traces swimming in my veins.  
No wonder I'm very rare with petite virtues.

Rest? I won't, lest I place my feet on my ancestral  
grounds.  
Malawi-Botswana, what a combination!  
Clash of ancestral spirits;  
Spirits making me lose coordination!

Who Am I?  
Am I, African Tswana or African Chichewa?  
Eastern or Southern Africa...  
Where do these roots emanate?

I feel... Like a tree in a forbidden forest,  
Branches to sprout from it's trunk...  
Will demand to plug to its roots;  
Roots that lead me to deadends.

Am I truly an African Tswana?  
The Kalanga supposed to be in me ain't my roots!  
The Ngwato in me ain't my roots at all!  
Certainly I'm African but where??

# WHO AM I?

**Oladeji Olowajooba**  
Nigeria

So, when they ask  
Who are you?

I want to say  
I am as volatile and random as water  
I change just as the wind  
sways the leaves of the trees

Most days,  
My mind is never made up  
just as the fly, who loves to perch  
on everything.  
While on some days, I am picky.

So, when they ask  
Who are you?

I can't fit myself in a box  
and present that to you as a Christmas present  
cause I am the whole store.  
All I want to say is 'I am who I am'.

No definitions nor precisions  
just infinite discovery.

# I AM A HEALER

**Temani Nkalolang**  
Botswana

When life taught me  
How to walk, I fell, stood again and walked.  
Incoherent I stammered and talked...  
Smiled I and marvelled, little did I know a soldier  
I was, being trained for battle.  
Life I blamed when with my panties, uncle  
Played hide and seek, sneak a peek between my  
thighs.  
Why me? I wailed but life...life watched me bleed.  
Time calibrates life into seasons, I learnt  
My response determined my next season.  
Bite the bullet or decorate the battleground?  
My broken self from the ground I picked  
And walked again, like she taught me...  
I cried, not for milk but to break the silence!  
My voice, the beast of abuse, castrated.  
My words disarmed the enemy.  
Bruised, broken, burned, I healed  
Now those bruised, broken, burned  
The touch of my words heal.  
I'm a healer.



# I AM

**Junior Gabriel**  
Kenya



Beyond the perceptions of me  
An emptiness lies that nothing could fill  
A void that governs my-self  
Denying me the pleasure of becoming a thing  
I am no-thing, you see  
But a space within a vastness  
My emptiness is a stage  
Where anything of everything may manifest.

# I AM AN AFRICAN

**Nahida Esmail**  
Tanzania

I am an African  
In my home country I am called an Indian  
In India I am called an African  
But I know who I am  
I know where I belong

My grandfather came by dhow  
from a place called Gujrat  
Months in the Indian ocean  
To arrive in Zanzibar  
Ruled by the Omanis

I was born in Africa,  
My father was born in Africa,  
My grandmother was born in Africa  
Yet, because of my skin I am not considered one

My ancestors have left a legacy  
They are part of making history  
Of this great nation  
History books may not have noted all their names  
But reality cannot be scrapped

This is the only land I know  
The only soil I love  
And consider home

Don't discriminate on the color of my skin  
Call me what you like  
Afro-Indian or Afro-dian  
I know who I am  
I know what I am  
I know where I belong  
I know my identity

I will always be an African  
This is my home  
This is my home soil  
This is who I am

# BLIND MIRRORS

**Williams Grant**  
Nigeria

A thirsty, wild, child  
That was once gay,  
Still as steel, steals a gaze.  
For Mirror is water.

And this wild child stirs  
The ripple to wash his face.  
Stares with each reflection cold,  
Mocking him —

Ragamuffin:  
The street's hymn for him.  
Do not forget your clothes,  
As worn as your soles.  
You'll never be better.

Puny:  
Your father's greatest effort  
Is a milestone weighing you down?  
You carried his face and hands.  
People saw the gravity,  
Till they declared you were down-to-earth.

Thirsty, wild, child,  
Work your hands to cowries' wealth  
For the mirror isn't identity.  
The mirror is future blind.

# WHO AM I?

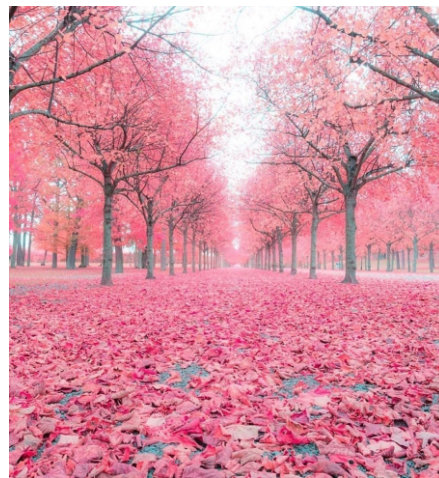
**Botlhe Motlamma**  
Botswana

I am the chosen one  
Some say I'm still young,  
But I am the reason for the change  
That takes place day by day.

I am tomorrow's future,  
I'm not a failure  
I am a game changer  
Born to live this life of danger.

I am art,  
Painting life in poetry  
Or to express my heart  
Using my words as symmetry.

I am a poet in disguise....



**GENRE: SHORT STORY**

**TITLE: REDEMPTION**

**WRITER: OHANYERE OGOADA, NIGERIA**

**REVIEWER: FUNMI RICHARDS, NIGERIA**

**R**edemption is a short story with themes across guilt, suicide as a vehicular expression of issues with mental health, surviving loss and false altruism. It is written in a first-person narrative and interestingly in such a way that the sex/gender of the character is unknown until the character is willing to be identified.

The writer skillfully transitions through the story using foreshadowing and flashback, both of which are embodied and expressed in the form of symbolism, imagery and paradoxes. The writer uses 'black' to symbolise nothingness, that is the oblique afterlife moment where your fate is yet to be decided, but you are not really alive. Also, the 'vision/revelation' is represented as that moment where resolution comes and reason for a future is given; 'hairpin' represents a

The imagery, on the other hand, is quite tangible such that you start to feel the scenes are not only figments of the imagination of the writer but moments in time of an actual human. All of which could imply that these scenes have been relived repeatedly so that it is familiar and tangible.

Though the story touches across multiple themes; one theme that seems understated but follows through the entire story is altruism or in the real sense, false altruism. From the onset, we see results of the character's blame-game with herself causing her to attempt suicide repeatedly, we also see how this 'altruism' makes her spend resources on religious intercessions she doesn't believe in and know to be false in a bid to 'comfort' her adopted mother.

Furthermore, we see how this 'altruism' in actual fact is baseless because she really didn't cause the death of her parents as she had thought. Finally, we see how she eventually accepts her adopted mother and refuels her altar of altruism with a new allegiance which could very well be thwarted again if she were to lose her adopted mum too.

In conclusion, the story is a call for awareness of possible or potential causes of depression – situational depression in this case as it is brought on by the loss of her parents. It also exposes the interdependency between people and the desire to please others and own burdens that are not ours to carry. And finally, it reminds us how powerful our minds can be when it has a purpose.

**GENRE: COLUMNS**

**TITLE: RECONCILING RECONCILIATION IN AFRICA**

**WRITER: LEO MUZIVORERA, ZIMBABWE**

**REVIEWER: NAMSE KHOTSO UDOSEN, NIGERIA**

**L**eo strikes a strong chord with this piece. Peace and reconciliation has been a thorny issue for many African societies. I am particularly interested because the issues raised in this essay can be related to my home country, Nigeria. Many years ago campus gangsters popularly called "cultists" were pardoned after a public show of renouncing cultism. Their past crimes were washed away; then we had militants blowing up oil facilities, kidnapping, raping and maiming citizens. A bogus amnesty deal wiped all that away. They were sent abroad for studies and paid monthly allowances. Recently, members of the dreaded Boko Haram sect, were rehabilitated and reconciled back to the societies they once terrorised. All these in a bid for reconciliation.

In this essay, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission along with Rwanda's Gacaca Community Courts are x-rayed. As I read the article, my mind wandered to Nigeria's Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission, popularly called Oputa Panel (it was headed by Justice Oputa). The panel was set up by the leadership of the 4th Republic to heal Nigerians of decades of military brutality. The result at the end was similar to what Leo presented in his essay.

He points out that reconciliation goes hand in hand with many other factors and generates many difficult questions. One of such questions is whether reconciliation "is trading justice for truth" as was the case in South Africa?

He notes that the trading of truth for justice is one of the low points of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He points to the calls for economic justice as a pointer that truth-telling is not enough. Unfortunately Nigeria's truth commission suffered the same fate. As Leo states "very little follow up work was done by the government and the policies left many South Africans feeling cheated, ditto Nigerians.

The article points to the opposite direction Rwanda took. Perpetrators of genocide crimes were tracked and punished. He describes the community courts where justice was swift on those found guilty of the crimes. That was the only way the wounds of the victims could be assuaged a bit. There are wounds that are never completely healed. This method also has been questioned by neutral observers. They question the objectivity and fairness of those trials done in the Gacaca courts.

The column concludes nicely with some words for leaders with conflict in their domains. "Reconciliation does not begin or end with commissions or trials. It requires change and transformation at the systemic level. This would be evident when victims and perpetrators are willing to work together to erase past hurts.

This is an apt and timely piece for our troubled times in Africa. I recommend further studies into reconciliation using a combination of the truth commissions and community courts to dispense justice as a tool for reconciliation.



**GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITEERATURE**

**TITLE: LET'S TEACH FOR CHANGE**

**WRITER: IMMACULATE AJIAMBO, KENYA**

**REVIEWER: ANTHONY NWAGBAOSO ONYEADOR, NIGERIA**

**T**he story is about Madge and how she became a taunt owing to her body size which was the primary objective of the story. The story began in a setting; a dark, pitch black dining room. Her mother at first, was scanning which of her daughters was wailing before tracing her to the room. She found Madge's head buried between her thighs. Then a conversation ensued as Mother sought for a solution to repair Madge's broken confidence. After a tight motherly hug, Madge recounts how she became a mockery of her size at different occasions. Finally, Mother came up with a solution: teach about Anorexia; which became a second objective: Anorexia as a teaching object of change.

**What is Anorexia?**

This is an eating disorder characterized by low weight, food restriction, etc. Mother requests her to use this disorder in a teachable way so as to impact change on the person and correct an ill done to her. So, Madge will eventually learn how to use anorexia as a tool of joke in reply. So she can reply the person is 'A figure one', 'Kpanla', or 'A thin stock'.

**What lessons does the Author map out for us?**

First, the story presents a two-fold scenario: the reaction displayed by Madge. Her character was in shatters because of her size and age as well as adolescents who are trapped by how to react effectively to this and the person who made the statement. A better approach to deal with such a situation and the reason why such comments, mockery or taunt was made. It varies across situations but shouldn't be read out of context.

This, Mother studied before giving Madge a great reply and thanks to Mother, she can return to school to reassert her confidence and reply well to her friends, teachers and other pupils.

The writer did great justice to role-play Madge's story as a tool for using teaching as an epitome of change. The story's settings, mood, plot and diction which became the third objective of concern were neatly interwoven.

**GENRE: POETRY**

**TITLE: DACHAU**

**WRITER: CHARLES DUNCAN, MALAWI**

**REVIEWER: TEMANI NKALOLANG, BOTSWANA**

**S**omething has to go wrong (disorder, discord, division) for there to be a need for reconciliation. Thus the prefix 're' meaning "back/again" and 'conciliare' meaning "bring together" suggest 3 things:

- the status quo (calm or harmony)
- disturbance of the status quo
- the need to restore the status quo

The poem 'Dachau' as it tackles spousal betrayal brings to light the aforementioned three things and thus stands as a locus classical.

The first line of the poem starts on a note of realisation as it presents both the persona's previous emotional calmness (status quo) and the now sore emotions that soar high with bitterness in the subsequent lines.

The diction employed throws the reader right in the middle of a concentration camp where the persona's raw emotions are let loose - anger, bitterness, vengeance, murderous rage - creating an emotional thriller. A heart betrayed is a heart capable of killing.

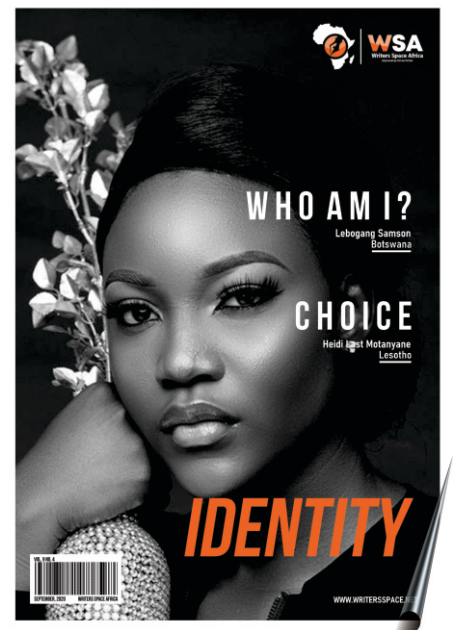
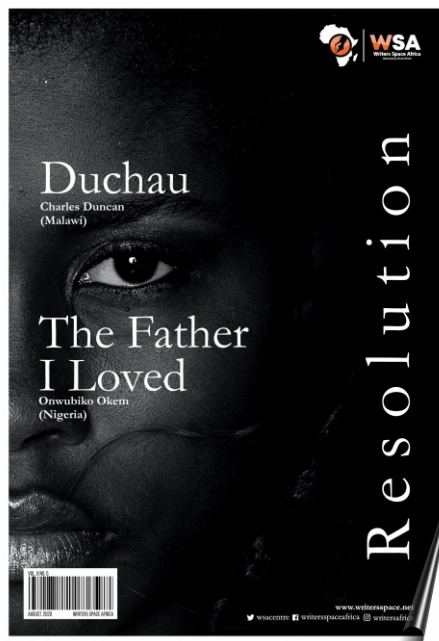
Skillfully weaving symbolism and imagery, the poem not only marries the persona's fire of vengeance to the worst kinds of genocide to ever plague humanity, but exalts them far above the Holocaust and Kigali genocide (S3, L3). Only when the reader reaches stanza 2, line 5 does she realise emotions got the better of her, it's not real, phew! But are they just lines in a poem? Look at the world around, the destruction vengeance gives birth to; the statistics are alarming, broken families, abandoned children, passion killings and we are still counting.

The poem draws a line between the persona's vengeance and the Dachau killers, citing provocation (S3, L1 and L5). Does this mean provocation justifies vengeance? Definitely not! As the persona introspects, he chooses forgiveness over vengeance (S3,L3-L8). The realisation that God forgave even the worst kind of sinners is a turning point and leads to the restoration of the status quo (S2, L3 and L4).

Thus, the poem which started on a bitter tone caused by spousal betrayal ends in a harmonious chord of reconciliation and leaves the reader in a pleasant mood of accomplishment like one who just solved a puzzle.



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