# WritingThreeSixty

## Journal of Research and Creative Texts

Volume 5 Issue 1

# WritingThreeSixty

## Journal of Research and Creative Texts

Volume 5 Issue 1

Letter from the Editor

This edition of the journal features a solid mix of the academic and the creative in equal measure as we continue striving to fulfil our mandate of being an interdisciplinary journal with polyphonic emphasis.

Simon Rakei's article should be of interest given the current climate and debate around identity politics. As always, we seek to feature local artists, poets and creative writers and this edition is no different in that regard: our editorial team continues to unearth emerging voices.

We hope our readers continue to support us. Sadly, we also bid goodbye to the Dean of the Humanities, Professor Duncan Brown who has been an ardent supporter of the journal.

Best Wishes,
Editor-in-chief
Llewellin RG Jegels

# Table of Contents

**The Khoisan Revivalist Movement and the Decolonial Turn: Authenticity, naming and cultural identities in Khoisan historiography for epistemic justice by Simon Rakei**

**Abstract**

The Khoisan revivalist movement has its roots in rejecting the term Coloured as an oppressive colonialist and apartheid imposition. As illustrated by Verbuyst and Bam, it is a movement of claiming identity and belonging. In this respect, the essay establishes the operative discursive framework of Khoisan historiography. Part 1 illustrates how the history which the Khoisan revival movement seeks to connect to – to affirm and demarginalize its cultural identity in contemporary South Africa – has been severely sullied by racism and its antecedent in the form of the temporal discourse of anthropology. The essay thus hopes to unpack the trappings for Khoisan historiography ordered by the temporal discourse of anthropology: this might mean not only an erasure of history, but a broader estrangement from the history the Khoisan revival movement seeks out in Southern Africa and Africa more broadly. The second part of the essay borrows from William Elis's tracing of genealogies and narratives of San authenticities, to attempt to envision what an epistemically just Khoisan historiography in relation to Southern Africa might look like. The essay concludes by drawing on what these connections might mean not only for Khoisan historiography

and the archives it could draw from, but for the Khoisan revival movement itself.

## Introduction

I had the privilege of attending at least three class seminars scheduled in the *Problematising the Study of Africa* course with activist Bradley Van Sitters – a member of the Khoi Revivalist Movement – who does work on preserving and restoring the heritage, culture and language of the Khoi Khoi and San. There were moments of organic learning, deep insights and understanding which I will not try to capture in this essay. However, this essay draws from some of the class discussions, particularly revolving around some of the trappings Khoi revivalism might find itself in.

The central aim of the essay is twofold. First, to establish the discursive space within which Khoisan historiography operates. Here the essay primarily turns to Fabian (1983) *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. Part one of the essay will thus establish the problematic of precolonial discourse and its operation in Southern African history (Tisani, 2018).

As it relates to anthropology: the aim is to show how anthropology establishes a temporal discourse to construct the Khoisan primitive (Asad, 1973) using time (Fabian, 1983:1). The essay specifically hopes to demonstrate how the secularisation of time leads to a universal and universalising history resulting in the formation of epochs (Fabian, 1983: 3), such as pre-colonial – whereby the primitive is still in a backward state of development whose periods are irrelevant and consigned out of history (Hamilton, 2018:98) all leading

towards modernity. In conjunction, typological time as reflective of quality of states (Fabian: 1983: 22) is used to explain the insistence of Khoisan historiography to maintain a discourse of "primitive mentality". The essay will go on to illustrate how the power structure within which the discipline takes shape proceeds to determine the description and analysis carried out by historians to preserve such conceptions and ideas (Wright, 1992). Because of the colonial encounter, the essay proceeds to demonstrate how a European cosmological outlook was imposed onto pre-colonial African history (Tisani, 2018:22) The Western worldviews forced onto pre-colonial history and African cosmology according to Tisani (2018) are: binaries, linear notions of time, Absolute otherness.

The second aim of the essay is to discuss through authenticity of identity and culture in Khoisan historiography. The bulk of Khoisan activists consider the present-day Coloured population to be the indigenous people of South Africa (Verbuyst, 2016:85). This is based on genetic ancestry (Bam, 2014: 123) to the San who have had the longest habitation in the Southern region of the African, dating more than 20 000 years back (Ellis, 2012: 9). This 'pure' 'genetic' based form of identification readily lends itself to essentialism thus distorting the very history Khoisan historiography seeks to unearth (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Archaeological study of precolonial Southern Africa classified both foraging and pastoralist communities under the term Bushman, (what Vollenhoven in the subtitle of her book "ancestral longing and belonging", a boesmankind). This other practice of anthropology – creating temporary distancing as a way of creating the object of the Bushman, has the effect of flattening, undermining and erasing the history of

the KhoiKhoi and San. Part 2 will explore how this naming, flattening and erasure of cultural differences between the hunter-gathering San communities and the Khoi Khoi cattle herders potentially affects the identity claims of the Khoisan revivalist movement and notions of authenticity.

The essay will draw on the insights on revivalist movements and cultural identity which Abu-Lughod (1991) draws in *Writing Against Culture*. This reflects on the tendency towards essentialism as outlined above. The concluding comment draws from the doctoral thesis by William Elis (2012) on *Genealogies and narratives of San authenticities* which complicates the narratives around authenticity through the various naming of the Khoisan over the ages. Referred to as the Abathwa by the isiXhosa speaking people, Baswara by the Tswana, the essay offers this complication and locates naming both as a form of decolonial historiography and an entry way to other archives, by locating and situating Khoisan historiography within an African frame of reference, language, and by extension, epistemology.

The essay will be split in two parts and structured around the aims as outlined above.

## Part I. The Temporal Discourse of Anthropology

### Conquest, Domination and Classification: Settlerist and Nativist Narratives in Southern African Historiography

The colonial expansion through Southern Africa began in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company came on the shores of Table Bay (Adhikar, 2010:23). This invasion in the Cape introduced a group of farmers, the trekboers, adding to the

already existing Khoikhoi pastoralist and the hunter-gatherer San community.

Historically, the influence of Western racist thinking dehumanised the hunter gatherer way of life as "an utterly debased form of life, merely inhabiting the land – much as animals do – rather than making productive use of it" (Adhikar, 2010). This framing of the native as someone deeply connected to the land, nomadic and with no intelligible language, living in a feral state not far removed from animals (Mudimbe, 1988), immediately located the San at the opposite of the Dutch settlers ideal of humanity. We see the work of anthropology in constructing a narrative by Europeans for a European audience analysing and explaining the domination of non-European societies dominated by European power (Asad, 1973: 14). Moreover, this colonial encounter gave the Dutch access to cultural and historical information about the Khoi Khoi and San society it was dominating (Asad, 1973). Khoisan historiography thereby emerges under two further dehumanising schema which classify and establish hierarchies between the Khoi Khoi and San.

The foragers, being closest to animals, are accorded the lowest rung on the social hierarchy. However, as expounded in part 2, though the term San is pejorative, it is a term originating from the Khoi Khoi denoting a thief, and someone of social inferiority more generally (Adhikar, 2010:23). This, however, cannot be said of the term Khoi Khoi itself, whose origin derives from what the early settlers initially termed Hottentots in referring to the Khoi. Yet as if this was not enough, Dutch

settlers used the term Bushman to classify both the Khoi Khoi and the San, effectively flattening and erasing differences between the two. It got to the point where it became ambiguous and uncertain for the dutch to tell them apart or to draw any distinctions between the two (Adhikar, 2010: 37), and this would be consequential in the portrayal of what became Khoisan historiography, fundamentally rendering it inaccurate and hence ahistorical.

Thus, the settler and nativist discourses are not only inseparably created through this matrix of conquest and domination, but the power of conquest also generates a certain universal ahistorical understanding of the native and a conception of the human whilst simultaneously enforcing the inequality between the European and non-European worlds (Asad, 1973:16). In the contemporary, this white-supremacist and racist conception can even be internalised by those who are othered by European colonialism.

Classified as 'mixed' on her birth certificate – only to be later brought closer to blackness and labelled 'other coloured' on her green identity card as a young adult in the 1970s, Sylvia Vollenhoven in her book *The Keeper of the Kumm: Ancestral Longing and Belonging of a Boesmankind*, describes how she always felt guilty about the inherent racism in the community that she grew up in (Vollenhoven, 2017:85). This detail, minor as it is, is important as she reflects on how whilst in most Khoisan families, only the names and details of white forebears are "handed down for endless repetition" (Vollenhoven, 2017:82); in her family they could not present any white ancestry to rescue their status by establishing relation to whiteness.

Immediately evident is a twofold significance for the purpose of Khoisan historiography: first, we observe the archival limits which Khoisan historiography draws from. A celebration of white Khoisan ancestry at the negation of African indigenous knowledge is at odds with the concept of uMakhulu – the grandmother – as an institution of indigenous knowledge in isiXhosa worldview and ontology (Magoqwana, 2018:76). Secondly, this is particularly important because the names of white forebears are handed down for recital and repetition – a common technique used throughout "precolonial" Africa to ensure those tasked with carrying and embodying the history would not fail to remember (Armah, 2002). Given the significance of the oral tradition as an alternative to the hegemonic concept of the archive, which tends to only validating history and knowledge as that which can be written and enfolded in time (Hamilton, 2018:100), this practice thereby constitutes a form of oral history, and also, due to its white supremacy tendencies – sullies both the history and potentially discredits the reliability of the 'archive'.

Based on the above, it would seem that those who claim the Khoisan identity run the risk of turning away and shunning the African connection upon which their claims to indigeneity and belonging rest. Upon the realisation that "Khoisan people and the descendants of slaves walk an identity tightrope strung across a minefield of inconsistencies" Vollenhoven (2017) is left with two unanswered questions. Having experienced being at the bottom of what she calls pigmentocracy in her youth growing up in the Coloured community, Vollenhoven (2017:82) asks: "When did it start, this affinity for whiteness

and disdain for other Africans? And why does it continue to this day?"

**Periodisation**

Armed with this narrative of the savage needing civilisation and a universalising history (Fabian, 1983), the temporal discourse found itself in fruition in Khoisan historiography; the San particularly were regarded as primitive, savage – beyond civilisation thus necessitating extermination. But more than that, for the purpose of anthropological discourse, this distance between the civilised and the savage, what Fabian (1983: 30) refers to as temporal distancing, gives rise to the mechanism which determine whether a body of knowledge is validated or invalidated by temporal categorisations. Thus, time is used as a means to classify Khoisan historiography under its appropriate place in "natural history" as the discursive formation would have it.

It is thus not surprising, that after 1994, most people thought that the Khoisan were extinct (Vuuren, 2015), locked away in their primitive world from which they were unable to evolve into the modern world of civilisation (Fabian, 1983:13). Indeed, the narrative of Khoisan historiography is narrated in the past tense, as if they do not exist in the present. This is the function of temporal discourse

Since informed by Western racist attitudes, pre-colonial Africa had no history before the presence of Europeans in Africa (Hamilton, 2018): the history of Southern Africa before the arrival of Europeans was thus to quote Hamilton (2018: 98), "consigned out of history", because "it followed from long

held stereotypes about most of the continent having no history worth discussing."

The term pre-colonial as an extension of the temporal discursive formation outlined above – and analogous to how the Dutch collapsed the Khoi Khoi and San into one category of Bushman – collapses together the eras and time before European colonisation into a single period. To put it in perspective, the San had been in the Southern region of Africa for close to 20 000 years (Ellis, 2012), and European colonisation was but 350 odd years old – merely a fraction of that larger history (Tisani, 2018). Thus, the term pre-colonial at once becomes imperial as it provides a periodisation centred on the domination and conquest of African societies by European power (Hamilton, 2018). The phrase pre-colonial therefore effectively makes the dominated a people without a history unless it is in reference to colonialism.

Khoisan activists aligned to the revival movement will readily relate to this and this formulation may be applicable to the 'discourse' around "Coloured" identity as imposed by colonialism and defined in relation to whiteness, outside of which the person with that label has no other history unless it is in reference to it (Adhikar, 2010). From this vantage point, we can begin to develop a more sophisticated account which explains why for example Khoisan families as observed by Vollenhaven, only recite the white ancestral line and not the African ancestry to their children. This contradiction embodied by the Khoisan, of: on the one hand rejecting the Coloured identity whilst willing to operate within its discursive order – in this instance, history negating African in favour of white

ancestry – and simultaneously appealing for African indigeneity, is a tension not necessarily to be condemned, but used rather as an entryway to mapping out a decolonial turn.

## Part II. Decolonising Khoisan Historiography: Identity and Indigeneity

### On Naming and Claiming

In one of our seminars (Centre for African Studies, 2019), Van Sitters made a timely intervention which set both my and his thinking across different points of significance which would later come to converge. Paraphrasing, Bradley invoked a well-known adage: the strength of a culture is in the strength of its language. In this respect, Van Sitters teaches the Khoekhoegowab language in which he is trained. We converged at two points asking:

First on language and names: why does the revivalist movement still cling onto the sullied term Khoi Khoi in denoting the relevance of Khoisan historiography given the well-known fact of its racist connotation? But more importantly, what does it mean for a revivalist movement claiming indigeneity and first nation status in South and Southern Africa, to do so under the construct which has been widely acknowledged (Adhikar, 2010) as colonial and Eurocentric in origin, the term Khoisan? This question, as Elis (2012), (Ncapayi & Mayongo, 2018) illustrate, becomes even more pronounced given that before European colonisation, various groups in the Southern African region, to flag the Setswana and isiXhosa speaking groups as examples (Ncapayi

& Mayongo, 2018:132), already had names and terms with which they referred to the Khoisan.

For Khoisan historiography and a decolonial turn towards epistemological justice, this fact is crucial.

First, it means that people who lived in the region had a way of knowing, of thinking about and understanding, the Khoisan, without referring to or relying on often racist and Eurocentric discourses on Africans. This fact provides a minefield for Khoisan historiography and for the revivalist movement who seek an authentic cultural identity and values and beliefs within African cosmology (Tisani, 2018:18). But more than that, and secondly, it potentially transcends the orders of how we academically think about history, a process of 'academic healing or "ukuhlambulula" (Tisani, 2018). You might have noticed the phrasing "that people who *lived* in the region *had* a way of knowing…" This presupposes a historical understanding of time as static, of one way of life, living, or thinking, as solely belonging or associated to a distinct period. We thus find an opportunity to connect to a cosmological worldview beyond the linear notions of time (Tisani, 2018) and drawing continuities.

In this respect existing Khoisan historiography perhaps does not need much help. As Bradley illustrated numerously, people living on the Cape Flats continually adopt mannerisms, language and thought forms from Khoi and San ontology, for example, in how they greet, folk tales about the city and the symbology attached to it. A more concrete example was the practices of people going up the mountains in search of

fynbos, a medicinal plant, directly correlating to the hunter-gatherer form of life of the Khoisan thus establishing a continuity and illustrating that "time does not belong to a period" (Van Sitters, 2019).

Secondly, it supports and bolsters the Khoisan claim to indigeneity when the term is located and rooted within African epistemology, with language being one such carrier of thought, knowing and being (Maseko, 2018). Of course, the Khoisan did not choose the term Khoisan. In fact, studies (Adhikar, 2010) show they prefer the term Bushman since it captures the fact that they would rather be seen and thought of as people who live with nature despite the negative connotation of the term. However, this is about self-naming and claiming. The opportunity before the Khoisan revival moment is to decide whether it positions itself within a European gaze or African frame of reference.

But more importantly, this positioning is not for the obvious political significance. Rather, I argue that the act of naming in relation to an African epistemology may potentially act to mitigate against the essentialist tendencies of such a movement, which the essay turns to shortly. By locating Khoisan historiography firmly within an Africa epistemological and cosmological outlook, the earlier trappings of temporal anthropological discourse might be lessened. This is because, once embraced within an African epistemology, conceptions and framing of the *other* are changed and no longer necessarily ordered by colonial constructs.

However, due to the nature of a discourse and history as a subject and academic discipline, one you are in the discursive formation – in this case of history you cannot escape it – as you use its methods to critique it (Said, 1978). A search for cultural identity within this formation will thus inevitably have the imprint of the colonial encounter.

Yet, Khoisan historiography beyond the academy has a much richer potential. If we take the invocation of uMakhulu as an institution of knowledge, we also get a different form of archive (Hamilton, 2018).

**Authenticity and Cultural Identity**

Quoting one Khoisan activist directly, Verbuyst (2016:86) observes how the revivalist movement is willing to model their cultural practices as 'pure' and unique. This is done to receive recognition and acknowledgement as indigenous. In approaching this, I take direction from Worden's (2010) argument in *After race and class: Recent trends in the historiography of early colonial society*. Given the new-found centrality of identity in historiography, it (identity) is to be found in the performative (Worden, 2010:53):

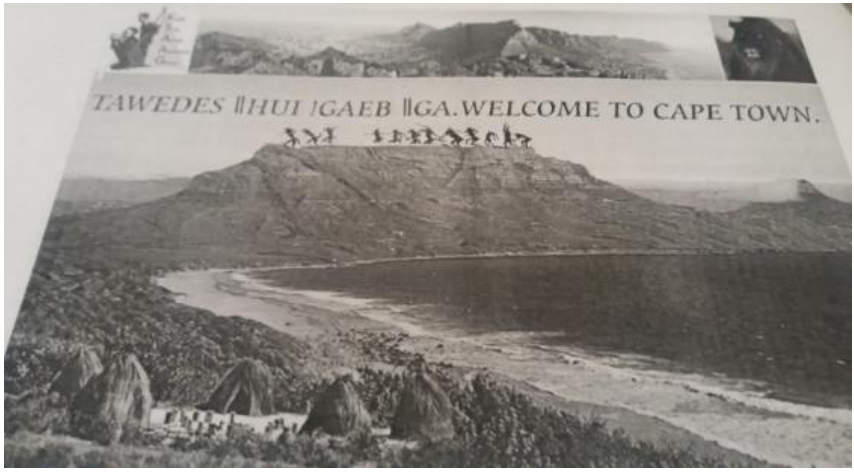
> The performative, that is the ways in which people defend or promote their identities, becomes a central concern of the historian.

Following this train of thought, one observes the trap of being ahistorical. The danger lies in how the notions of authenticity are once again ordered by a discourse which trap and erase history (Abu-Lughod, 1991:45). The Khoisan revival

movement for instance at times is willing to "downplay the differences between vastly diverse groupings that fall under the "Khoisan" label to create a homogenous identity as indigenous people" (Verbuyst, 2016:86). This reverts to the colonial historiography which flattens and collapses differences thus erasing history. Moreover, this may then also lead to essentialist readings of identity as demanded by discourses of authenticity in order for Khoisan indigeneity to fit into constructs shaped by anthropology in how it defines the self and other (Abu-Lughod, 1991:45).

## Conclusion

It might then seem that in search for authenticity, it may be lost. Or, on the other end of the scale, drawing from post-colonial theory, one might find that the Khoisan revivalist history might then simply find itself mimicking the dominant culture, acting at its dictates, accepting its strategies and discourses but replacing them with its own tropes and characters (Ekeh, 1997). Yet, this would only once again conform to the anthropological trapping of the discourse on authenticity and its narrow conception. Upon reflection, a richer historiography might actually seek to understand and analyse this performance of identity as a method of seeking cultural preservation. Indeed, several cultures across the continent have since had to reinvent and redefine their identities and practices as a result of the colonial encounter in order to preserve and maintain them. The fact that they are not practiced in the manner prior to the colonial encounter does not seem to undermine their authenticity, since what is authentic is acknowledged as the expression of that cultural group.




Adhikar, M. (2010) “Khoe and San Active Awareness Group, Poster. As posted on Bradlox Van’s Facebook page.”

## References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1991). Writing Against Culture. In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (pp. 137-162). School of American Research Press.

Adhikar, M. (2010). A total extinction confidently hoped for: The Destruction of Cape San society under Dutch colonial rule, 1700-1795. *Journal of genocide research, I-II* (12), 19-44.

Armah, A. K. (2002). *KMT: in the house of life: an epistemic novel* (1st ed.). Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh.

Asad, T. (1973). *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1st ed.). London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bam, J. (2014). Contemporary Khoisan Heritage Issues in South Africa: A Brief Historical Overview. In L. Ntsebeza, & C. Saunders (Eds.), *Papers from the Pre-Colonial Catalytic Project. Volume 1* (pp. 123-136). Cape Town: Centre for African Studies.

Ekeh, P. (1997). European Imperialism and the Ibadan School of History. In P. Ekeh, *Problematising History and Agency: From Nation to Subalternity* (pp. 401-422). Buffalo: State University of New York.

Ellis, W. (2012). *Genealogies and narratives of San authenticities: The ǂKhomani San land claim in the southern Kalahari.* Ph.D. Thesis. University of the Western Cape.

Fabian, J. (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1st ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Hamilton, C. (2018). The long southern African past: Enfolded time and the challenge of the archive. In J. Bam, L. Ntsebeza, & A. Zinn (Eds.), *Whose History Counts? Decolonising African Pre-Colonial Historiography* (pp. 91-116). Cape Town: African Sun Media.

Magoqwana, B. (2018). Repositioning uMakhulu as an Insitution of Knowledge: Beyond 'Biologism' towards uMakhulu as the body of Indigenous Knowledge. In J. Bam, L. Ntsebeza, & A. Zinn (Eds.), *Whose History Counts? Decolonising African Pre-Colonial Historiography* (pp. 74-91). Cape Town: African Sun Media.

Maseko, P. (2018). Language as a Source of Revitalisation and Reclamation of Indigenous Epistemologies: Contesting Assumptions and Re-imagining Women Identities in (African) Xhosa Society. In J. Bam, L. Ntsebeza, & A. Zinn, *Whose History Counts? Decolonising African Pre-colonial Historiography* (pp. 35-57). Cape Town: Africa Sun Media.

Mudimbe, V. (1988). The Power of Speech. In J. Currey, *The Invention of Africa* (pp. 44-97). London: Indiana University Press.

Ncapayi, F., & Mayongo, M. (2018). The study of earlier African societies before colonial contact in the Xhalanga magisterial district, Eastern Cape. In J. Bam, L. Ntsebeza, & A. Zinn, *Whose History Counts? Decolonising African Pre-colonial Historiography* (pp. 119-139). Cape Town: African Sun Media.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism.* London: Peregrine Books.

Tisani, N. C. (2018). Of Definitions and Naming: I am the earth itself. God made me a chief on the very first day of creation. In J. Bam, & A. Z. Lungisile Ntsebeza (Eds.), *Whose History Counts? Decolonising African Pre-colonial Historiography* (pp. 15-35). Cape Town: African Sun Media.

Verbuyst, R. (2016). Claiming Cape Town: towards a symbolic interpretation of Khoisan activism and land claims. *Anthropology Southern Africa, 39*(2), 83-96.

Vollenhoven, S. (2017). *The Keeper of the Kumm: Ancestral Longing and Belonging of a Boesmankind* (1st ed.). Tafelberg: NB Publishers.

Vuuren, H. v. (2015). Approaching an extinct indigenous culture: The /Xam colonial archive. *Research Gate*, 96-110.

Worden, N. (2010). After race and class: Recent trends in the historiography of early colonial society. *South African Historical Journal, III* (62), 589-602.

Wright, J. (1992). Working with Southern Africa's past 1500-1880. In Dirs (Ed.), "*Papers from the Pre-colonial Catalytic Project"* (pp. 1-10). Cape Town: Centre for African studies.

**The artwork of Caelyn Robertson**

ARTIST STATEMENT

I am inspired by people. Knowing my model is an important part of my process and am challenged to capture what lies beneath what is obvious to the naked eye. My approach to why I do what I do is very simple. We all see life through different lenses. What I create is through my lens, however, an artwork to me is like a room full of mirrors. They are reflections of the subject, the creator and the viewer eternally bouncing back and forth.

## Poetry by Shakeelah Mowzer

### Hair Loss

the cat in our backyard is hunting mice, I think it's the neighbour's, a white sky is always the best sky, but I love the rain, not being caught in the rain, just observing nature's meltdown, a woman smacks her cheating husband, the wind blows and we think it's a cool breeze but that's just the wind's way of telling your friend with a horrible man-bun to fuck off and vape somewhere else, school, books, boys, essays, tests, your idiot best friend who lost her virginity in a car, insta-this hashtag-that likelikelike, PE class, those stupid damn shorts, clean shaven legs, they'll be hairy tomorrow, oh my God did you see what she was wearing, the hair in the drain after you shower, am I going bald, am I dying, I'm a college student, you say it so proudly, tests, essays, reading, assignments, more tests, daily stress, a weekly depressive episode, and a fancy piece of paper at the end of it, now you ask yourself if it was all worth it as you sit in your cubicle trying to sell Irish people American products, staring at the monitor, oily face, dirty hair, red eyes, half a cup of coffee, it's cold, and you're five kilos heavier than last month, oh, did I forget to mention that you are single?

**Black Ball**

She should have stopped him the first time.

In the stuffy office where two people can't stand side by side
the lock on the door would click down,
and when the door opened her face never broke.
She wonders who has the bigger black ball in their chest.
Him or her?

She should leave.
He should have left four years ago.
She knows all he wants is her mouth,
she guesses his wife no longer wants to open up for him.
He is not handsome and he shows his teeth when his mouth sneers,
and his scent is unpleasant like expired musk.

She should have stopped him the first time.

**Peeling Onions**

and the kettle screeches

and the man takes the milk out of the fridge

and he pours it into the sink

and it smells putrid

and he hears a dog talking

and he turns

and it's an ad for insurance

and the woman puts the knife down

and she wipes the sweat off her brow

and she frowns at the shot of pain in her back

and rolls her shoulders for relief

and she hears two cracks

and the man walks past her

and he did not clean the spilt cooldrink off the floor

and she sees a cockroach against the wall

and the butter melts like an ice cream cone dropped on hot gravel

and she smells the onions

and the salt of her tears

and the breeze from outside

and the smell of smoke

and the wet clothes on the line

and he did not kiss her that night either.

**a broken mirror**

queen of the handball court the only

rose on the thorn bush like a bulb dimming

and a boyish attitude but pretty girls are preferred

four years a favourite then given to a cousin

who still plays with dolls fun times at sleepovers

and music videos but almost fell into the pool

like an inflatable dancing doll screams in the hallway

a tennis match between champions like a child's homemade

volcano with cracks in it and a fly in the sink drowning

under the tsunami from the tap and a cockroach

crushed under a boot yellow pus oozing out

like the fresh cream of a chocolate éclair

someone took a bite out of with fist prints in pillows

like frantic scribbling and ink smudges on a pinkie

salt juice dripping on paper and snot sucked up

into the waiting area of a face indented in a pillow

and when you look in the mirror I am no longer there.

## Short Story by Stephanie Williams – Make Hell Your Home

In our empty house, I sit with a cup of hot chocolate that dad hides in the highest cabinet in the kitchen. I added only two teaspoons because I am scared he'd notice I took some without his permission. Winter hasn't given way for spring, so I curl up in bed with Jodi Picoult's *The Tenth Circle*. The illusion of hell fascinates me. The protagonist's mother, Laura Stone, is a college lecturer who teaches Dante's *Inferno*, in which the ultimate punishment is not fire but eternal ice; the inability to move; frozen forever.

I am frozen here in this house. Mom left one night while I was sleeping, and although it's been five whole years without her, I still feel frozen in time. I am still that seven-year-old girl waiting for mom to get back from the grocery store. I sometimes wonder if she had kissed me on my forehead while I slept, lingered in my room, before she took off. Dad doesn't talk much, he just sighs a lot and hands out orders like he thinks a father's supposed to do. And I grab it like a needy child.

An old note that reads 'We're out of milk' still pasted on the fridge in mom's messy handwriting. Dad doesn't bother to take it off.

The first night dad didn't come home, I had just turned eight. The rain fell like stones on the roof and against the windows. I sat in front of the telephone waiting for it to ring. I imagined someone from the hospital calling to tell me that dad was in a terrible accident. But when the phone didn't ring and *Top Billing* finished playing on the TV, I prepare myself for the worst. I imagined that he had left me, too.

I went into the kitchen and opened the cupboards. Dad never cooks for us, but things will be different now, I told myself. I remember my friend Stacey's house and how it always smelled like baked goods when I went around to visit. Her mom had a job, but she would still come home and bake. I wanted our house to smell like baked goods, too.

We had flour and sugar and… I checked in the fridge… no milk. Mom's old note was right even if she wrote it five years ago. I bet the smell of baked goods doesn't come from milk, I told myself. It's all in the sugar. I didn't want to mess it up, I knew if I was going to raise myself, without a mom and dad, I would need to save up on food. I searched the drawers in the kitchen for mom's old cookbook. I found it under the sink. It smelled musty. The pages were torn in half and mom's favourite pasta recipe had pen scratches all over it. I couldn't make out any of the words.

I found a sponge cake recipe. I didn't understand the measurements, but I guessed half of everything wouldn't be too bad. In a bowl of flour, I added butter and sugar. Cracking the egg was harder than I had thought it would be. Pieces of the shell fell inside the bowl. I got tired of picking out the pieces and decided it would be better if I just mixed it with the ingredients. I stood on a chair and stirred as fast as I could. And then I got tired of stirring. The big mixing spoons were for grownups. I ended up using my hands.

The instructions said, 'the mixture should be of a dropping consistency, if it is not, add a little milk.' I added a little water. I poured the mixture into a baking pan, placed it in the oven and turned it on. I was happy with my cake. I wished mom was home to see me. But then I was glad she had left because I got to do it all on my own.

I was sitting on the chair in front of the oven, staring at my creation. I was waiting for it to rise. I kept looking at the picture in the cookbook and then at the cake in the oven. Mine didn't look anything like it. But I had bet it would soon.

I heard a car pull up in the driveway. My heart started pounding. If it is a stranger, I will tell them my dad is asleep, I told myself. But it was dad. I heard him drop the keys. He groaned and sighed while picking it up. He unlocked the front

door. When he entered the house, he saw me sitting in the open plan kitchen with mom's old cookbook in my hand.

'Dad, I made a cake. Look.' I pointed to the oven.

He walked over and stared down at me. 'Do you want to burn down the house?' He switched off the oven and opened the oven door. He didn't even look at the cake. He wrapped a dishcloth round his hand and tossed my cake into the sink.

I cried, but not because I was sad. I was upset that he had come home. I didn't mind taking care of myself.

I still don't know why he came home late that day. Tonight, is no different. I know when he gets home, he'll go straight to his bedroom and sleep. I am older now. I have learnt to make other dishes from mom's old cookbook. I hide most of it from dad. By the time he gets home the food are already wrapped in foil and tucked into mom's old Tupperware like little children at bedtime. Everything that pertains to mom is now old. Mom's old cookbook; mom's old stove; mom's old note on the fridge; mom's old Tupperware; mom's old wedding ring. She is an old story. But people never get tired of asking old questions: 'Do you miss her?' and 'Do you know why she left?'

Stacey's mom doesn't ask any of these questions. She just asks, 'are you hungry, dear?'

At first, I would lie. My dad cooked for us, I would say.

'My dad cooks, too' Stacey would say.

'That's nice. What did he make?' Here I would struggle to answer. It is hard to picture my dad cooking, let alone to think of what kind of dish he'd be good at. It took me a while to realise that Stacey's mom only asks this question to see whether I'm telling the truth.

'No worries, dear. Stacey doesn't always know what she's eating either. I made dessert. I'm sure you'll enjoy it even if you already had a nice meal with your dad.'

If it was warmer outside, I would have gone over to Stacey's.

After I finish drinking the hot chocolate, I rinse the cup and leave it on the sink. I check to see if all the windows are shut and if the door is locked. In my room I stare at the cover of *The Tenth Circle*. I have been reading it since the age of seven. At that age I couldn't grasp the story—though I tried every year until I was old enough to understand.

I understand it now. Trixie's relationship with her dad is so different from my relationship with my dad. Trixie's dad saves her from hell. My dad has left me in hell. Not knowing why mom left is a hell on its own. I wish I was Trixie instead. Sometimes I picture myself in Trixie's life; I wonder if it would be better to have been raped and have my parents care for me,

than to be safe in a home with no parents to care for me. Dad gave me this book one afternoon during our June holidays.

'What are you staring at me for? Don't you have anything to do? Dolls to play with?'

'I'm too old for dolls. The girls at school have smartphones.'

He got up from the chair in the living room, walked to his room, and returned with a book in his hand.

'Here' he held it out. 'When I was your age, I read books for fun.' I don't exactly enjoy the book. I read it because mom's handwriting is on the inside. It's addressed to dad.

*To Charles,*

*I read the blurb.*

*It seems promising.*

*Love, Lisa*

I think about that note a lot, but I would never ask dad what she meant by it. *It seems promising*. Why does it seem promising? Maybe if she had read the book, she would have stayed. Trixie's parent tried to fix their marriage. Maybe mom didn't try hard enough.

Picoult's language is complex. I know that after every rereading of the book, I learn something new. I discover something I had missed before. I have only read the blurb once

since dad gave the book to me. I turn it around and attempt a second reading. I try to find a link between mom's note to dad and the blurb.

*Fourteen-year-old Trixie is the light of her father, Daniel's life.*

I pause. I read that line over and over again. Tossing it around in my head.

*Daniel, a seemingly mild-mannered comic book artist with a secret tumultuous past he has hidden even from his family, venture to hell and back to protect his daughter.*

The tears started to well up in my eyes like a weak bladder.

I never wait up for dad to get home. But tonight, I decided to sit on the small chair in the kitchen. The exact position I sat four years ago. I am taller now. The chair is too small to hold my weight, but I am determined to relive this moment. Reliving it also means that I can do it differently.

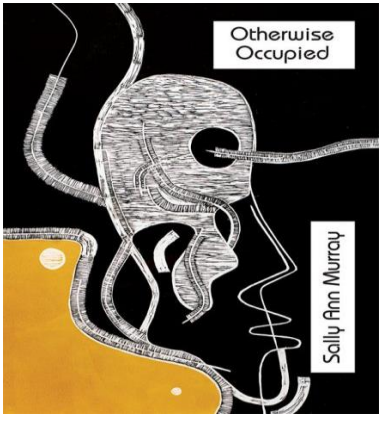
Half an hour has gone by when I finally hear his car pull up in the driveway. I hear his keys. He unlocks the door and I stand up. He seems surprised to see me standing in the open plan kitchen with *The Tenth Circle* in my hand.

'Dad,' I say, my voice ringing in the big, empty house. 'Am I the light of your life? Is that why mom left me with you?'

## Review of Sally Ann Murray's: *Otherwise Occupied* by Lisa Julie

Dryad Press
ISBN: 978-0-6399141-7-6

Sally Ann Murray is a South African born author. She is the current Chair of the English Department at Stellenbosch University. *Otherwise Occupied* is her third published volume of poetry; her previous collections are *Open Season* (2006) and *Shifting* (2002).




***Otherwise Occupied*** questions everything that is related to the formation or the construction of "the poem". It questions language, diction, placement, tone. It questions everything.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it questions our 'torpidity' as readers of contemporary South African poetry. It questions our reluctance to disrupt conventions as contemporary South African writers. It questions why we as

writers are so reluctant to play, and why we as readers are so apprehensive to engage.

The collection is unique, and it is uniquely challenging. It is unapologetic. I cannot claim to know the work of the author very well. However, I do know that Sally Ann Murray has aligned her work (to a careful extent) with the works of the Language poets. The Language Poets or *L=A=N=G=A=G=E* poets (named after the magazine) were an avant-garde group (or tendency) that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. My rather scarce knowledge of the poetics of the Language poets prompted me to uniform a kind of postmodern poetics. I therefore anticipated the re-appropriation of certain words in the collection. I anticipated an emphasis on disjunction and a somewhat unusual typography. I also imagined that a lot of the content would be moderately feminist.

But then I read "Body Works" (p. 25-26) and I am struck by the balance of humour and emotion driven by lyric. I read "Husband and Wife" (p. 27) and I am struck by the conviction (the sheer conceivability) of the unfolding narrative. And then I ask myself, how does one write across all poetic genres with such fearlessness? As a writer, I suppose this is a question for my own contemplation.

However, Sally Ann Murray goes beyond the idea of illustrating the potential of language. For many, the structure, the form, and the general aesthetic of the collection seems forced. As a literary scholar, I naturally questioned the poet's decisions regarding placement and form. In other words, I questioned why an entire stanza should be italicised or indented. In "Life Support" (p.23) I questioned the poet's decision to place 2D shapes in front of the text. However, I do believe that this is where the power of the individual poems and the collective project lies. It demands a certain level of engagement. It activates the role of the reader. It places equal weight on language and on placement. It places equal weight on the role of the speaker and the reader.

At first glance, I suspected a book of "serious" poems in tone and in content and perhaps this was because of the title. Instead, Sally Ann Murray has produced a collection that demonstrates the contrary. Her poems demonstrate her ability to be 'otherwise'. It is a demonstration of artistry.

## Contributors

### Caelyn Robertson

Growing up in Cape Town, South Africa and born to a musician father and artist mother, Caelyn Robertson was exposed to life in the arts from a very young age.

As a portrait artist, Caelyn's subject matter is people and she has experimented with various techniques, with oil being her medium of choice over the years. As a self-taught artist, she has found tremendous fulfilment in expressing herself, discovering her strengths and exploring them to greater depths. She strives to improve her craft with every new portrait she paints.

She predominantly paints females. Her paintings reflect the warmth, strength, beauty and serenity that are true to the female species at their best! She has an eye for detail and her works are bold and expressive in both colour and technique. She paints from her own photographs. As she has grown in confidence and skill as an artist, so has the scale of her paintings!

At present she works from her home studio in Cape Town, South Africa. Caelyn has participated in many group exhibitions locally as well as international shows throughout Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Caelyn is frequently commissioned to paint personal portraits since she started her career in painting and her artworks are now in many private residences throughout South Africa, Europe and USA.

**Lisa Julie**

Lisa holds a BA and Honours degree in English Literature and is currently completing a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape. Her focus subject, and research, is poetry which includes the influence and functionality of objects in poetry.

**Shakeelah Mowzer**

Shakeelah Mowzer is an aspiring poet and fiction writer. She is currently completing her BA Honours degree in English Literature at the University of the Western Cape. The title of her honours research is titled, "Rebellion Against Convention: Sexuality and Mythology in the work of Japanese Poet Hiromi Ito."

**Simon Rakei**

I came to Cape Town for my studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2014 after matriculating from Rhodesfield Technical High School in Kempton Park, Johannesburg. I completed my undergraduate degree in Financial Accounting, and my Honours in Taxation with the Department of Finance and Tax.

My focus of work has been with a self-publishing popular education collective *Pathways to Free Education*, and with the *Alternative Education Popular Education Programme (ALTEPEP)*. ALTEPEP is non-profit which I helped co-found. We aim to make use of critical pedagogy methodologies to facilitate transdisciplinary spaces between school going youth, university and TVET students along with community activists in dialogue

on questions of energy as it relates to production, service provision, ownership and "work" with a focus on renewable energies. I am also currently registered for an interdisciplinary Masters programme in Theories of Justice and Inequality housed in the Sociology Department at UCT.

In addition, I work as a research intern for the activist-support NGO *Alternative Information and Development Centre* in the Economic Justice programme. My main area of work coincides with my current academic research interests in political economy broadly, with an emphasis on international taxation, mining, alternatives to large scale extractivism, illicit financial flows, base erosion and profit shifting. In my spare time I try to finesse my guitar and mbira playing skills. I also semi-regularly write creative non-fiction, poems and essays on my personal blog site.

In the past, I have served on the executive committee of the Thethani Debating League (TDL) – previously named Township Debating League as the Training Director. TDL is a student run organisation based at UCT offering training and coaching in competitive debating to students from under-resourced schools in Cape Town and runs the only debating league for township schools in the city. I have also been involved in several struggles and have been actively engaged with and in various activist spaces.

**Stephanie Williams**

Stephanie Williams is currently completing her BA Honours degree in English Literature at the University of the Western Cape. Her Honours research is titled, "Jan Klinkies as a figure of resistance: A reading of Zoe Wicomb's story, *Jan Klinkies*".

## Editorial Team

**Llewellin Jegels** Editor-in-Chief

Llewellin is a Mellon Foundation Fellow of the Center for Humani-ties Research. He is a published novelist whose academic focus lies in life-writing (auto/biography), memory, the contemporary novel, poetry, post-coloniality, re-narrativisation of history, cultural identity and legacies.

**Martina van Heerden** Copy Editor

Martina has recently completed her PhD in English Studies. Her research interests include academic development, academic literacies, feminism and science fiction. She also tutors and lectures in various courses within the Discipline, including English 111/121, 311/321 English for Educational Development – CHS and Science. Martina serves as Copy Editor for the postgraduate online journal WritingThreeSixty.

**Shazia Salie** Social Media Manager

Shazia is an MA student in the English Department at UWC, focusing on reading visual and textual representations of the African American slave, Sojourner Truth in, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth. She is also a fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research at UWC.

## About the Journal

WritingThreeSixty is a bi-annual, interdisciplinary journal for research essays and creative works. First launched in 2014 as an initiative of the English department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), WritingThreeSixty now forms part of the broader community within the Arts Faculty and Humanities at UWC. This journal maintains the standard of peer review and wishes to provide a platform to develop a culture of publishing among postgraduate and emerging students, as well as established creative artists within UWC and South Africa at large.

WritingThreeSixty also forms part of co-curricular graduate culture at UWC that affords students the opportunity to develop professional skills through the voluntary leadership and service positions created through the journal. These positions include the management of the journal and its team, editorial outputs, as well as our digital marketing efforts that are presented through social media and our online website.