



Interview with: Busisiwe (20)
Interviewed by: Gcina
Date of interview: 14 March 2017
Travel: South Africa – Malawi - Zimbabwe – Botswana – South Africa

Gcina: We can start now. You will have to speak louder.

Busisiwe: You're making me laugh. Are you already recording, my sister? You will have to ask me questions in order for me to answer you.

Gcina: I will ask you questions only if there is something I want you to clarify for me. But this is your story and you must tell it in a way that you feel comfortable with. When you feel that you are not comfortable anymore, we can go to another place where you will feel comfortable.

Busisiwe: Okay. So you said I must speak loud like a crazy person?

Gcina: Okay, we can go inside so that I can hear you and you don't have to speak too loud. Yes, now please continue.

Busisiwe: Alright. So I left the rural areas in 2010 (Laughs).

Gcina: *Hayibo!* In 2010?

Busisiwe: Eish ... (both laughing) in 2000, am I right? Wait, Gcina. In 1989, I was doing Standard 9, am I right? I repeated it in 1990. Then I left the rural areas and went to do my Standard 9 in another place because the school that I was in only went up to Standard 8.

Gcina: In the rural areas?

Busisiwe: Yes. So when I went to do Grade 11, I went somewhere else, that is, I went to boarding school. It was in 1989. I had failed and had to repeat in 1990 and then I passed it. Then in 1991, I left the rural areas and went to my uncle's in Johannesburg. Are you still recording?

Gcina: Where in Johannesburg?

Busisiwe: In Westonaria, Johannesburg. He was working there in the mines. That is where I met Mohammed.

Gcina: What made you leave the rural areas?

Busisiwe: I was abused so much. My uncle and my grandmother were raising me and my uncle was too powerful. I was [caught] in a situation that was not good at all.

Gcina: Oh, so you went to live with another uncle [in Johannesburg]?

Busisiwe: Yes, I went to live with another uncle, the youngest one. I left home when my mother was not around. I did not even know my father. From 1989, there were a lot of quarrels at home. I knew my mother but she never took responsibility for me. These are the reasons why I left home. Then I went to an older uncle and that's where I met the father of Yusef. I fell in love with him while he was working at Milky Lane in Lenasia.

Gcina: Who is the father of Yusef?

Busisiwe: Mohammed Miraaz.

Gcina: Where is he from?

Busisiwe: Malawi.

Gcina: Okay.

Busisiwe: I got involved with him and I fell pregnant. We then came together to live here in Durban.

Gcina: Which year?





Busisiwe: Ey, it's long ago. I don't remember the date. It could be 1991, but I am not sure. We came here to Durban and I fell pregnant with his baby. When I fell pregnant, we started having a lot of fights (*ngamaliswa*) so I left him. We used to live in Chatsworth at Unit 02. He was already working here in the Chatsworth Milky Lane. I went back to Johannesburg. When I delivered the baby in June 1993, I came back to him in Chatsworth and we lived together for about 10 years, I think.

Gcina: Did you guys own a house in Chatsworth?

Busisiwe: We were renting at Unit 02.

Gcina: How was life there?

Busisiwe: Life there was good. He was a Muslim [and observed Muslim rites]. Then a woman wrote a letter for him to say that he was her child. She was not allowed to live in South Africa without documents during the apartheid years. So she got an ID for him. That woman hurt me a lot. She said I couldn't live with him because he was her child and we were not married. I insisted that I would not get married without *lobolo* being paid. It was stuff like that.

Gcina: That means there was a clash of cultures?

Busisiwe: Yes, but I continued to stay with him because I had a child with him.

Gcina: Was this woman from South Africa?

Busisiwe: She was from Transkei. She had been married in the Islamic tradition and not the Xhosa tradition. She said she voluntarily chose this for herself and I would not have to do that. There was no need for her to push me into doing the same thing.

We lived there with my child. I got a job at Milky Lane but by that time he had left to work in Clairwood. I was at Milky Lane for about six months. I left because my child was too small. Then I found another job at Wimpy in Chatsworth and worked there for over a year. I left because I had a problem in sending the child to the crèche. I didn't have anybody to look after my child when I was working different shifts.

Gcina: You were still living in Chatsworth?

Busisiwe: Yes, we still lived in Chatsworth. Then when we left there and Mohammed left me at his home in Lenasia, Johannesburg.

Gcina: Who did he leave you with?

Busisiwe: He left me and my child with his friend who lived with his girlfriend. She was a Sotho from Sebokeng. He went to Malawi for just a month then came back to South Africa. Yusef was born at Lerotong, Johannesburg. When his father came back from Malawi, we went back to Durban.

Gcina: How old was he at that time?

Busisiwe: Who?

Gcina: Yusef.

Busisiwe: I think he was learning how to stand on his own. That was around the time his father came back from Malawi. Yes, it was just after he could stand on his own that we went back.

Gcina: Does his father go to Malawi often?

Busisiwe: Yes, he was always travelling home. He likes visiting his grandfather there. He always told me it was his grandfather who had raised him.

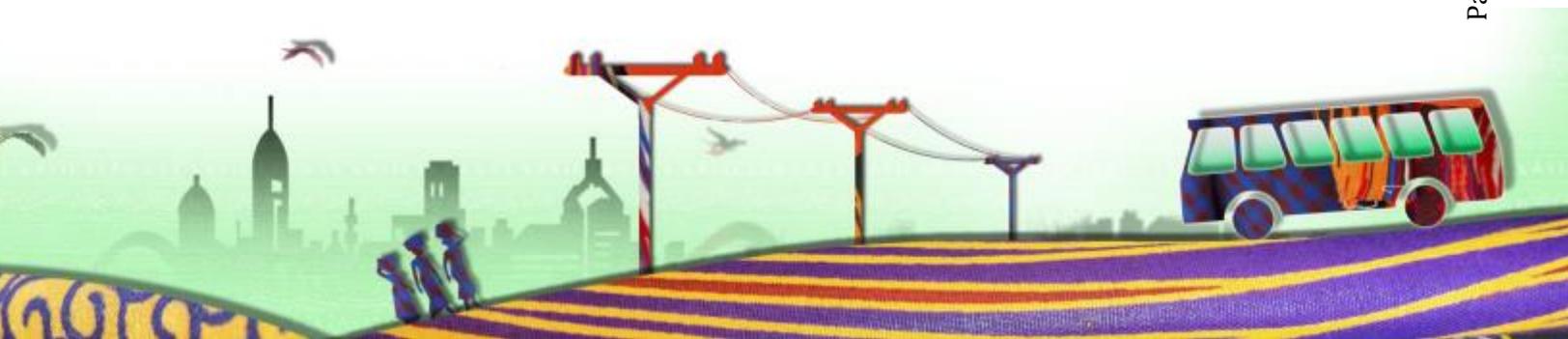
Gcina: Okay.

Busisiwe: What happened is that he took me to his home in Malawi.

Gcina: Where in Malawi?

Busisiwe: Mangcophi.

Gcina: Okay.





Busisiwe: I went to Malawi and I stayed there but I did not enjoy it because of the poor living conditions. Those people are very poor and I did not like to live there. But he did not want to leave Malawi. We started fighting. He had bought a car and sold it. I took that money from the sale and hid it. I remember we even were using the cloth diapers for the child. I took all the money and I hid it [in the diaper] because I was so mad at him.

Gcina: Napkins not disposables?

Busisiwe: Yes. I noticed that there were many South Africans in Malawi and they did not have passports. They had been stolen by people from Malawi who went back to South Africa to enjoy life. This was also his plan for me too.

Gcina: Wait, these people who were dumped there were women?

Busisiwe: Yes, it was women who were [stranded] there, even very old women who did not have passports. I remember there was an old woman who said that her surname was Zulu. I used to go and visit them and all those people from South Africa. Some of them used to say that it was nice [in Malawi]. I asked them what was nice about it when tinned fish cost R20 and was not readily available. It was so expensive. You would buy things like Oros for R50 or R60. Life was just not right there. But they insisted it was fine. This meant that this guy had planned to do the same thing with me.

Gcina: So you say that these men take women from South Africa with a plan to leave them at Malawi?

Busisiwe: Yes. They would take them as wives there. Then he would go up and down with different girlfriends in Durban. He would visit you in Malawi while you remained there to take care of the homestead.

Gcina: Oh, you would remain there and become locked in their homes?

Busisiwe: He would have a family [in Malawi] and you would just be a slave in that household, doing everything for the family. You would see him after two or three years.

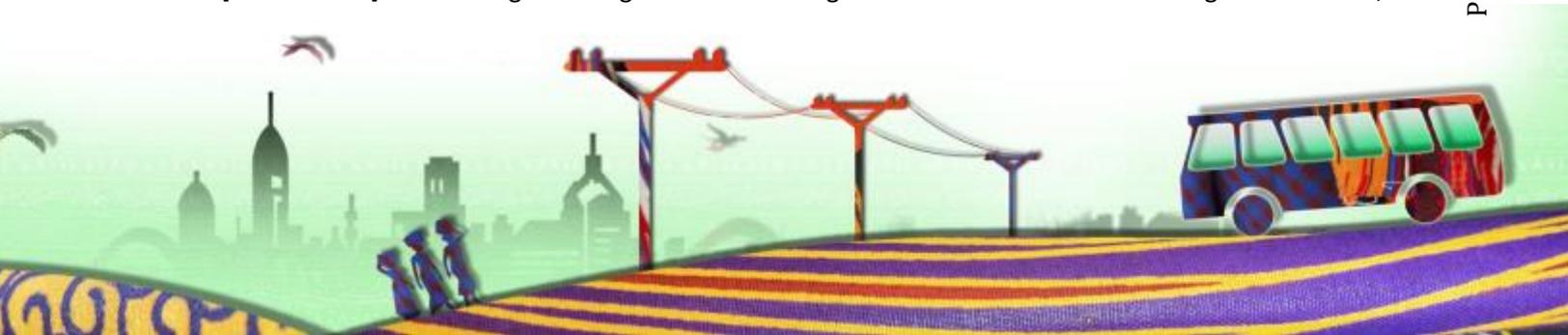
Gcina: Oh, okay.

Busisiwe: So I really am convinced that this is what he was planning as well. So when I saw that, I decided to steal and hide his cash which he got from selling his car. I folded the cash in the baby's napkin. We fought and I just said he would not get it. He said he would be going the following day, and I said, never, [you] are not going. I just took the child. He even [held] the baby not knowing that the money was in the child's napkin (laughing) and it was very full.

I put the child on my back and left. I was scared to death, Gcina. We crossed a wooden bridge and I went to a police station. There were security guards there and when I tried to speak to them in English, they spoke their language. I asked to see their manager because I could see that there was a communication breakdown. Their manager came and I told him that I am from South Africa and [my visa was expiring] in one day. I said I had come here with the father of my child and he was now abusing me and did not want me to go back home. I had only been given 21 days to be in Malawi and now I wanted to go back home to South Africa.

Then the father of my child came with his friend and they spoke in their language which I do not understand. I told them not to speak their language because I did not understand it. I said they should speak English so that I can also defend myself and I saw that they wanted to gang up against me.

So the manager started speaking in English. He spoke and spoke. I have to be grateful to him because he did not take Mohammed's side just because they are from the same country. He told him [Mohammed] that he is not allowed to take a person from another country to abuse them in their country because I also do not have a right to do the same in my own country. So he said that he [Mohammed] was wrong in doing this. The manager told him that if I want to go back home,





Mohammed should send me back home. He said he was only giving him three days to take me back home. He added that he had to go and extend my [visa]. He said I had to go to the South African embassy so they could give me three more days or more. So if after three days I am not gone, I would have to go back to them and they would send me to the South African embassy (in Blantyre) and they would take me home. So he said fine, he would take me home. The following day, his friend came with another car—because he had sold his car—and we came back.

My child Yusef was so sick, Gcina. I sent him to the clinic. When you go to the clinic they put the child on a scale—the one you place in a tree.

Gcina: Oh, the one where the scales hang?

Busisiwe: Yes, the ones we used to use long ago.

Back there [in Malawi] there would be a long queue and people were really sick. The way that the doctor checked the child! He would just press the tummy of the baby and he would say: “Next!” I went straight to him and said: “Listen here, this thing that you are doing ... pressing the tummy of the baby and the moving on ... I don’t like it. My child is sick and I want you to tell me what is wrong with my baby.” And he said: “Are you from Zimbabwe?” I said: “Does it look like I am from Zimbabwe? I am not from Zimbabwe. I am from South Africa.” And then he took out his equipment to examine the baby.

Gcina: So at first he checked the baby without using the relevant equipment?

Busisiwe: Yes, the children there are not properly checked out, but because I complained to him and told him not to dare do that to my child, he found that the baby had double pneumonia.

Gcina: Oh.

Busisiwe: So they said the child had to be admitted [to the hospital]. I waited at the side for the results and I peeped into the wards and saw that the mattresses were full of urine. There were no bed sheets on their sponges. When somebody was admitted there, the family has to cook and bring them food because their government does not supply the hospital with food.

So when they said they would admit me with the child, I said: “To where exactly?” I told them that the sickness would definitely get worse and that I could not sleep there. I told them to give me the treatment and I would go. So they only gave liquid treatment. If they were tablets, they would be ground and put in liquid for the baby to drink. They do not have things like Panado or even liquid syrups. I took what they gave me and went back to the house and stayed there with my child till the following day.

Gcina: Which year was that?

Busisiwe: When was it? It was 1995.

Gcina: But when was Yusef born?

Busisiwe: He was born in 1993.

Gcina: How old was he at that time?

Busisiwe: Two ... I think he was two years.

Gcina: This means it was in 1995?

Busisiwe: My child really got sick. So we came back to the car. He could not even eat. He could not do anything. We even ran out of diapers. (Phone rings).

Busisiwe: Where did we leave off?

Gcina: You said you came back with the child. When you came back to South Africa, did you continue living in Johannesburg or you came straight to Durban?

Busisiwe: We came back with the sick child, remember? We had even run out of diapers. I even began to wrap him up with my clothes. We went to Harare.





Gcina: Were you on foot?

Busisiwe: We were travelling.

Gcina: Oh.

Busisiwe: When we got to Harare, I sent him to the hospital. They also told me that the child had double pneumonia and he had to be admitted for two weeks. I told them that I could not be admitted because at the border gate they only gave me one day to be out of the country and that's how you have to pass. So they said that we had to sign something which [indemnifies them] if anything happened to the baby because the doctor advised that we be admitted and we did not take the advice.

So in Harare, they prescribed medication that we had to go buy at the chemist. We bought it and gave it to the baby. We left and went to Botswana. We found out that our driver did not have a driver's license so we were taken to a place next to the police station. I went inside to fight with the police officers. I asked them if they wanted my child to die over there because the baby was sick. The driver had run off. Then they gave us the car and Mohammed had to drive although he also did not have driver's license. But they let us drive away. We left and drove to Durban. When we got here, at around 5pm, we went straight to R K Khan hospital.

Gcina: Oh, so you came here to Durban?

Busisiwe: Yes, we did not go by Johannesburg. I took the child to R K Khan and I explained the whole story. They checked the child and said that the medication I had been given was good because the child had really improved. They said they would continue to treat the child. So we went back to Chatsworth to some man's mom's place.

Gcina: Are you still alright here?

Busisiwe: Yes.

Gcina: I don't want you to be uncomfortable with sharing these things with me.

(Both laugh).

Busisiwe: When we left, we went to live at Chatsworth and I got a job at Blue Lagoon and that's where we found you guys (laughs). It was so nice working at Blue Lagoon. We lived a nice life for many years.

Gcina: How do you define a nice life?

Busisiwe: We basically had everything. We had money and things were not so expensive. We could afford things.

Gcina: Did you get paid well?

Busisiwe: Yes, we got paid well (laughs).

Gcina: So what is funny about that?

Busisiwe: It makes me happy because it was my first time to get paid well and live a nice life. I was even able to build a house in Newlands.

Gcina: So you built a house in Newlands? When?

Busisiwe: In 2000.

Gcina: Where in Newlands?

Busisiwe: At Westridge. I built a house and I even had a car while I was working at Blue Lagoon. I bought a car because I was doing well. Things were going so well but after some time I lost my job.

Gcina: How did you get [that place]?

Busisiwe: I got a site and I was sponsored with one room.

Gcina: Wait. Please explain to me about the sponsor. How were you sponsored?

Busisiwe: I was not really sponsored because it was not free. They made me pay R5523.

Gcina: For what?





Busisiwe: They told us we had to pay for that house.

Gcina: Was that RDP housing?

Busisiwe: Yes, one room.

Gcina: Okay, who told you that you had to go register for it?

Busisiwe: I was told by a lady who used to help look after my child.

Gcina: How did you have to register? Did you have to go to the Department of Housing?

Busisiwe: No, people from Newlands would be gathered together and people from [the Department] would come. I did not live in Newlands at that time.

Gcina: You lived in Chatsworth?

Busisiwe: No, I was not living in Chatsworth anymore. I had moved from there to Overport.

Gcina: When did you move?

Busisiwe: I moved because we did not get along anymore with that woman who became Mohammed's mother. I don't remember when it was, but it was while I worked at Blue Lagoon. We moved to Clare Estate for a while before we found a house that had been repossessed by the ABSA bank.

Gcina: How was life at Clare Estate?

Busisiwe: There was a lot of crime in that place.

Gcina: What do you think was the reason for the crime in that area?

Busisiwe: Because there were a lot of informal settlements.

Gcina: So you lived near informal settlements?

Busisiwe: We lived in [subsidised accommodation], but we were not happy there because we still paid a lot of money [in rent].

Gcina: What kind of a place is Clare Estate?

Busisiwe: There are suburbs and there are a lot of informal settlements. That place used to have Indian houses but many of them have moved.

Gcina: It was for Indians?

Busisiwe: Yes, but most of them have moved. Only a few remain.

Gcina: When you were renting, were you renting the whole house?

Busisiwe: No, we were sharing the house. There were many families there. We were mixed with coloured families in the same house.

Gcina: Oh, was it like a triple story house?

Busisiwe: Yes, it was like that.

Gcina: How long did you stay at Clare Estate?

Busisiwe: I think it was for about six months and then we found out about the house that was about to be repossessed. But it was not in good condition and it [was not fit] for people to live in. Then we moved to Overport.

Gcina: Even Overport used to be an Indian area?

Busisiwe: Yes, it was an Indian area. We stayed at Westwood and it was very nice over there. But it was an area for the rich people (those who eat a potato for R2).

Gcina: You said Mohammed found himself a mother. Does he use her surname in his documents?

Busisiwe: Yes.

Gcina: As you were going around living in different places, did she choose these expensive places for you to stay in?

Busisiwe: You must remember that Mohammed did not want to live in other people's places because they are abusive.





Gcina: What year was that?

Busisiwe: It was in the 1990s. Remember that Mohammed came here in the 1980s and when he came here he experienced a lot of abuse.

Gcina: How?

Busisiwe: He had bad experiences. In those times foreigners were really not wanted here. Police officers set their dogs on him and they bit his feet. He still has the scars. The police were very harsh to foreigners. Because I am also from Eastern Cape, I also did not like to stay with people from KwaZulu-Natal because they are too violent. I just didn't like them.

Gcina: Which ones?

Busisiwe: Zulus. I did not like them [because of what we heard in the rural areas]. We won't go to KwaMashu because we are scared of guns. We heard about the fighting and we could not understand people who killed other people. We do not have that where I come from. My experiences of the violence of Zulu people comes from when I lived in Johannesburg. They used to say that if a person did not speak isiZulu he would be killed.

Gcina: Then what did you do?

Busisiwe: I had to learn isiZulu. I asked the people that I lived with to teach me isiZulu. I even left my uncle because they would ask you what is an elbow in isiZulu and you would be stuck and knee (Laughs).

Gcina: I did not ask you for your name and surname.

Busisiwe: Oh, I am Busisiwe Hlophe from the Eastern Cape. I was born in Harvent and I studied at Harvent until Grade 10. I went to Ndabezandile High School for Grade 11.

Gcina: Ndabazani?

Busisiwe: Ndabazandile High School.

Gcina: Okay. Now I would like you to tell me about when you came to Durban. The way you talk sounds like you are coming from remote areas, where life is not too fast but peaceful.

Busisiwe: That is the [life] I prefer. That's [a nice life].

Gcina: So how did you adjust when you got here?

Busisiwe: I will never get used to the life here in the townships of Durban. I stayed for too long in former Indian areas and I loved that life. I did not know township life. I was even scared to go there. When I had to go to Dorcas, I was scared to go there. I did not even know where it was.

Gcina: Where is that?

Busisiwe: I went to look for Dorcas who was going to represent me in my case at Blue Lagoon. I did not know and it was my first time.

Gcina: Where exactly is that in Durban?

Busisiwe: In Inanda. I was so scared, my sister. I did not even know where to go, my lord. I thought people would just see that I did not know that place and they would kill me.

Gcina: You had the impression that the place is not safe?

Busisiwe: Yes.

Gcina: Okay, but you stayed and you are still here.

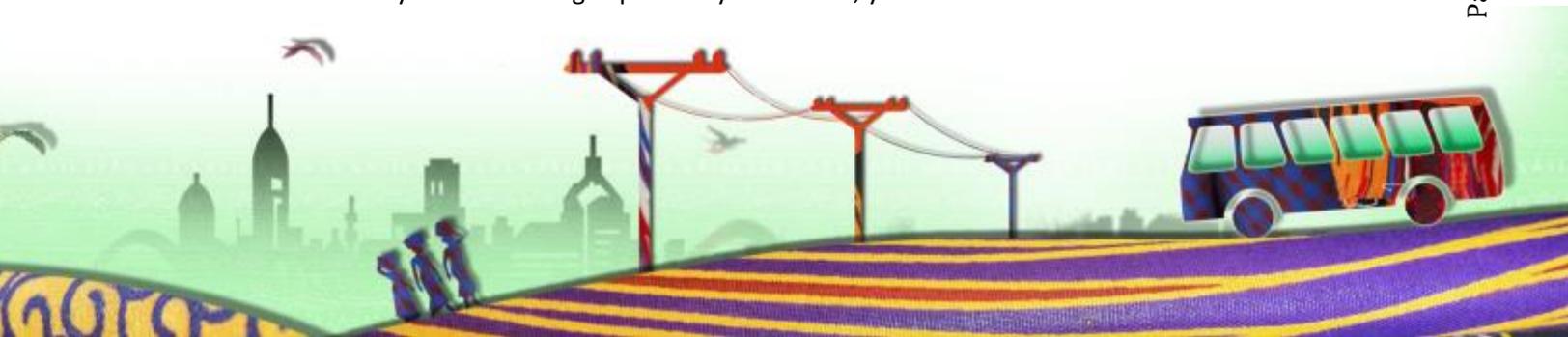
Busisiwe: Listen here, my love. I left when I lost my job at Blue Lagoon. I went and stayed at Newlands. I went from a flat to a house in Newlands, the house that I built. I did not like the life over there.

Gcina: Why?

Busisiwe: What I did not like there is that the people from Durban are jealous.

Gcina: Why do you say it's people from Durban?

Busisiwe: It was my first time living in proximity with them, you know what I mean?





Gcina: When you say people, do you mean black people?

Busisiwe: Yes, I mean black people. I only really encountered them in the workplace. I did not really care about or engage with them and they lived their own life. So when I had to live with them 24/7, I had to adjust. No, I did not like it—I don't want to lie. If I had known before, I would have sold the house earlier. But I had to think of my child and where I would go to.

Gcina: What exactly became a problem for you?

Busisiwe: People, dear. You know, Gcina, what I have noticed about the people, especially from KwaZulu-Natal, [is that they are so narrow]. We live together as neighbours and we all have children. They are raised differently in our homes. The problem with the people in KwaZulu-Natal is that they never leave their province. You don't know how to live with other people and so you don't treat other people very well. Everything around you is the same as it was when you grow up—even coming from Ulundi to Durban.

Gcina: In other words, you mean Durban is like a centre of KwaZulu-Natal?

Busisiwe: You know what I mean! Yes, you did not leave because it's comfortable here, *ukuxakeka*, and you don't have to go outside of your comfort zone. You guys are able to access jobs around here. People who say they are not from here, people who come from KwaMaphumulo or eNkandla and those places [do not fit in]. You have not travelled far to be here. This has spoiled a lot of people. I am telling you, they are really spoilt. The second thing ...

Gcina: What do you mean when you say they are spoilt?

Busisiwe: They are spoilt in the way that they do not understand that other people travel to come here because of the things they lacked. Some of the people who have experienced that are musicians. You see, musicians know because they travel to other countries and in other places they see what is happening. With xenophobia, you don't understand what is happening in other countries. Even Xhosa people, like me, are being discriminated against here. Sometimes [you hear people saying that] Mpondos are here and why don't they don't go back to their home. What are they here to do?

Gcina: You are discriminated against?

Busisiwe: Yes, we are discriminated against. As it is, there are no employment opportunities in the rural areas. You find that Durban is a better place, like Cape Town and Johannesburg. We also want a better life and that's why we travel. And then we find we get abused through that. So for you guys, Durban provides you with many things. But if the city was smaller and it could not provide for all you guys, you would also be forced to leave and go look in other areas. This is why other people leave their countries.

I am not saying that they should come here and do all those wrong things, you know what I mean? People must come because they are pressed (*baxakekile*). There must be a way for them to come in so that they are not discriminated against.

Gcina: What route should people use to come here?

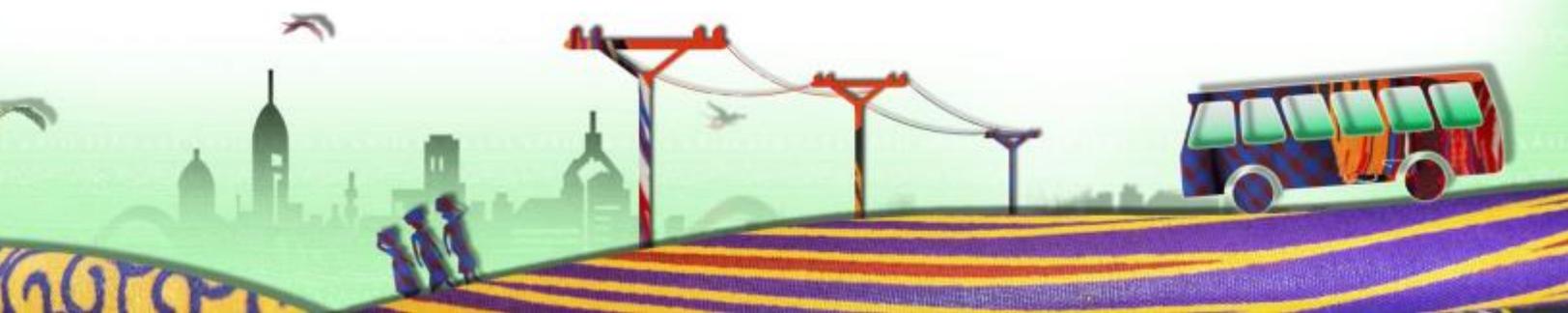
Busisiwe: When I look at things, I realise that there are now too many [foreigners] here and they are really taking up many jobs.

Gcina: Which jobs?

Busisiwe: You see, my love, I used to work at Chicken Licken. I was chased out by a foreigner for no reason.

Gcina: How did he chase you out?

Busisiwe: I did not have previous experience working in this industry but I worked at Chicken Licken and I liked it. After about two months, I was offered a management position—which I never asked for—and the problem started when I went to Johannesburg for two weeks training in management. Another





manager saw that I did not know anything about Chicken Licken, you know what I mean, so he had powers over me.

Gcina: Was he also in a management team?

Busisiwe: Yes, he is also a manager and the only one. So when I came, the employers said they wanted me to be a manager as well. So he made me his assistant although in Chicken Licken there are no assistant managers and I did not know that. I only found out from Johannesburg that there are not supposed to be assistant managers, do you understand? Each Chicken Licken needs to have at least two managers.

So when I came back from the training in Johannesburg, he fought with me because I was trained more than him. He did not have that training. He learnt what he was doing on the job. Because I was well-trained in Johannesburg by people in high positions, he was so jealous and treated me so badly. He caused me to be on a wrong footing with the management (*wangixabanisa*). Can I please tell you the way I got fired at Chicken Licken?

It happened like this: A woman came in with a 5kg bag of chicken from Shoprite (costing about R100) and she forgot her packet. So it was put in the freezer where it stayed for a whole week. So then the children asked me where the packet was. I said I did not know but look in the freezer. This guy came around and found us at the freezer. He asked us what we were doing. I told him that we were looking for this woman's packet. He asked if it was still there. I said yes. Even when all of that was happening, we were not on good terms and he kept on fighting with me. I heard that even when I was in Johannesburg, he kept on telling the staff that when I come back I will not be in charge—he was the one who was in charge. Over his dead body would I ever be in charge.

Gcina: Where is he from?

Busisiwe: He is from Congo.

Gcina: Okay.

Busisiwe: He is from Congo and the employers normally took his side.

Gcina: How long has he been here?

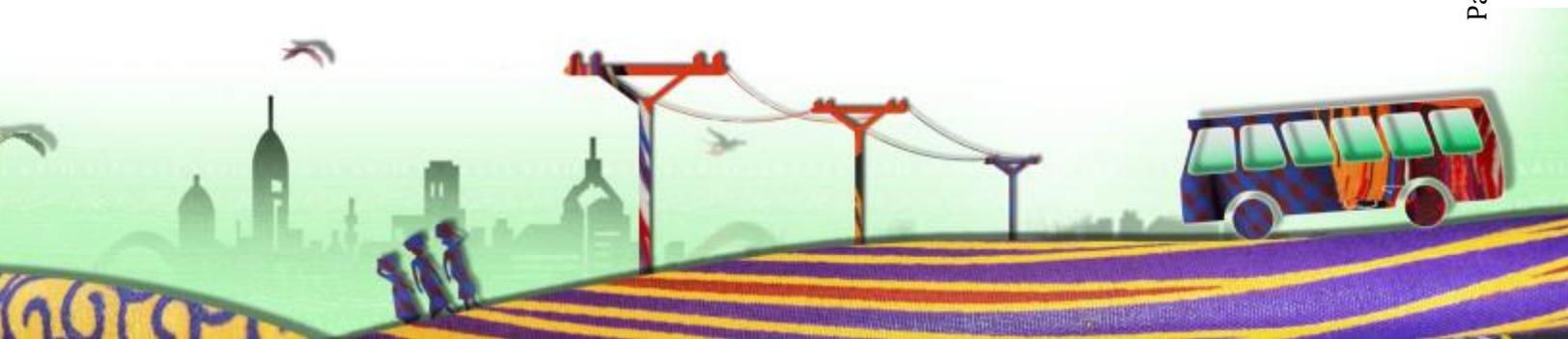
Busisiwe: He had been here for a long time. He started by having a table (selling informally in town). Then he worked at the Engen garage in Springfield. From there they brought him to Chicken Licken where he is a manager cashier. He was sent to Johannesburg for three days' training. When I came, I was sent for two weeks' training. That is how I had more training than him.

Gcina: Okay.

Busisiwe: So because of that he felt that I would overpower him and he fought me. So many things happened, Gcina. Sometimes I did not even like to go to work. I continued going there because I did not want it to seem like I just stopped working for no reason. So eventually we reached the issue of the story of the 5kg of chicken. One of the workers spoke to him after they had divided the meat among themselves. She asked if they could cook this meat. I was not even there when that happened. I was busy packing my orders at that time.

As I said, we were fighting all the time and I was already told that I was no longer a manager. I was told that I just had to listen to him and take orders from him, so if he said he wanted me to be a cashier for today, that is what I would have to do. If he told me to do something else the next day, that is what I would do. You understand what I am saying?

So I was a packer at that time. So these kids (workers) cooked this meat. I don't know what happened after the store closed. What I know is that he claimed that he never allowed them to cook this meat.





So I think that he ganged up with the kids against me and said that it was me. I went to the kids (workers) and they told me that they were told that they could cook this meat. The only thing that I wanted to check is whether it was halaal as this was a halaal store ... [It was not halaal]. When they had cooked the meat, this guy from Zimbabwe (Mbasa) who told me it was not halaal started fighting with the kids. He had seen them cooking it all along. When he asked who said they could cook the meat, they said it was Mbasa. He said he did not say that. The manager said he would have to fire Mbasa. I really don't know how things changed and I also got involved in this thing.

Gcina: Hawu!

Busisiwe: I am telling you. I was called to a hearing on the 14th. At the hearing, I was told that the charges against me were that I had opened the meat and fried it. I do not even know how to do those of those things. But that is what my charges were saying.

I was dismissed on the 14th. Their lawyer was told to come dismiss me. This guy always used to say that he calls the shots at the time that he chooses. As it is, Gcina, I received a message from one of my ex colleagues that they have reduced their hours of work. They now only work nine days, for three or four hours [a day]. And the working conditions are not good. They receive such bad treatment from a person who is from outside South Africa. Do you know how painful that thing is?

Then eventually people are attacked because they are foreigners. You know with me, Gcina, sometimes I run out of food and I think of this guy [and what he did to me] and I say, oh Lord, I forgive him. Fathima goes to a private school and sometimes I do not have money to pay the fees. I would think that I was working once and was no longer working because I am a foreigner.

Gcina: All of this makes you angry?

Busisiwe: Perhaps if I was another person, there was something that I could do, but I just decided to leave everything to God.

Gcina: Don't cry. Things will be fine. How are you finding life now after migrating? How are you feeling about it, excluding your work challenges? What is your plan going forward?

Busisiwe: You see, Gcina, my friend, this is so painful. If I were to tell you the story ... (she cries) ... My mother has never loved me.

Gcina: Is she still alive?

Busisiwe: She is alive. She was working for the government for a very long time. My mother has never loved me. I only found out late that she is my mother. I used to think that my granny was my mother and my grandfather was my father.

Gcina: Where did she live?

Busisiwe: She used to live and work in another place.

Gcina: Oh, so she also migrated to live somewhere else?

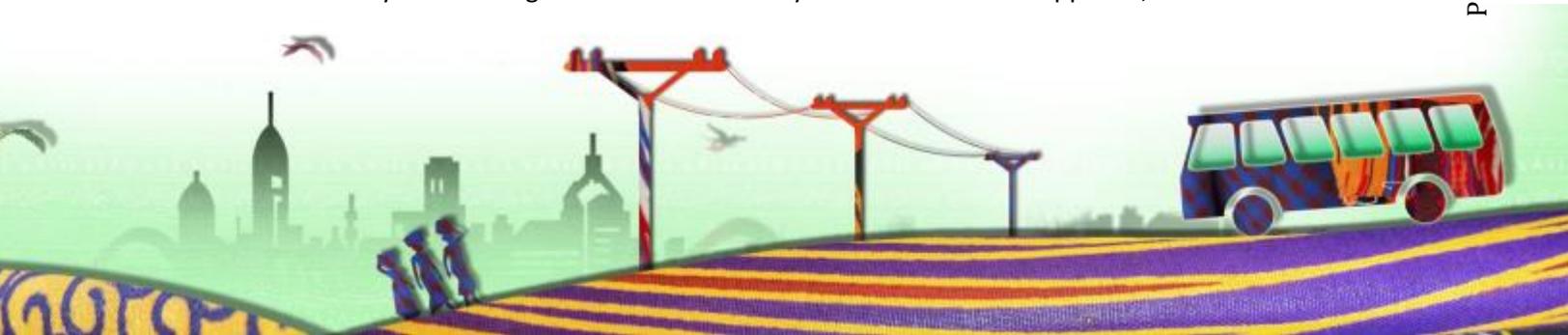
Busisiwe: Yes, but she never used to come back home.

Gcina: Do you mean she went awol? *Ubebhungukile* (she left without returning for a longtime)?

Busisiwe: I got to know her in 1981. I used to see her before when I was very young. Granny used to send us to her house and I would see that woman who was a new bride in that family (*owayengumakoti*). I never knew that she was my mother. Granny used to send us there. She has never acknowledged me as her child, not even once.

Gcina: That means that she was not allowed to do that where she was?

Busisiwe: So my story goes like this: My mother left her home without her parents' permission because my grandfather was very strict. She went to East London and met my father. I don't know how they met. I think my father had given her a lift. I actually don't know how it happened, Gcina.





Then she fell pregnant and she did not want me. She wanted to have an abortion but in those days it was not easy to get abortion as facilities were not there. She just knew that she did not want a child, that's it.

She then told her friends that she did not know what she would do because her father was too strict. She had this idea that after I was born she would put me in a sewerage tank, you know what I mean. Her friends told that story to my older uncle and he went back home to tell my grandfather about this. Grandfather said they should go and get the child and bring her back and that is how I was raised by my grandparents.

Gcina: Oh, okay.

Busisiwe: Even that marriage that she was in did not work out. I remember when she came back home, she fought with her husband. I did not know that she was my mother. She got that government job while she was at home because that was a deep rural area, just like KwaMashu and Inanda. Soldiers [the defence force] came to our area and she went to work in their kitchens. That's how she got a job. Then they moved to Bisho.

Gcina: She went with them?

Busisiwe: No, she did not. They sent her to work as a cook at the police station. I remember that at the time, it was 1988, when I passed I had to hide there. But even when I reached there, they did not show me love. She did not do anything for me. The reason why I left school was because I was poor. She was working and she had even moved out of home. Even when I went to her, I never got anything from her. So I thought that the school business was a waste of time. I left her like that. So when I got to Durban, I tried to improve my life, but I have had this grudge against her all this time.

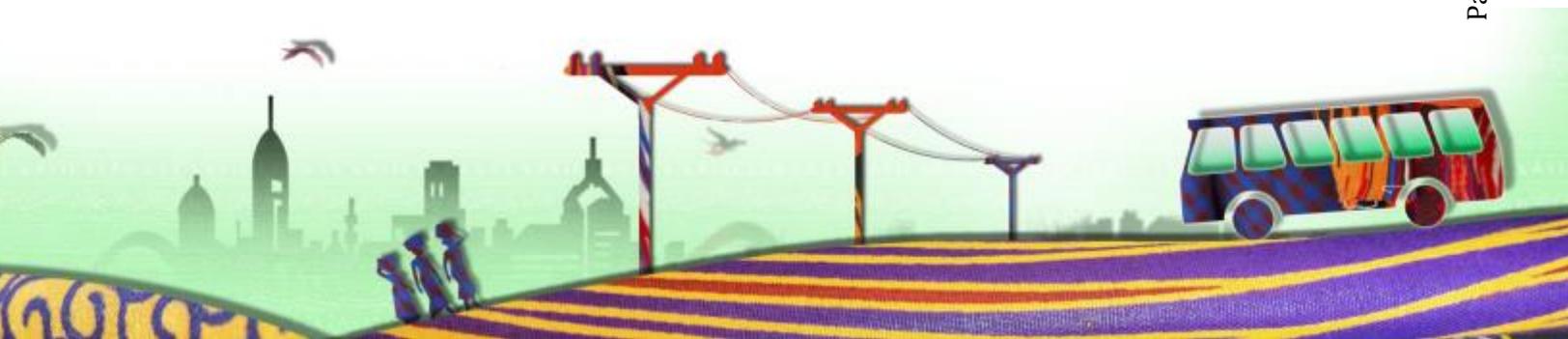
Gcina: That she did not play her role?

Busisiwe: Yes. I was doing well when I lived in a flat at Overport with Mohammed. He loved me because he saw that I was a person who has progressed, and I thank God for that. You know Musoli Mahlangu ... when he says that he is thankful to God for being rejected by his family and being accepted by God. Sometimes I would look back, Gcina, at the life that I lived as a small child in the rural areas where I was being abused by my uncle. In my whole journey, God was protecting me although I did not know him at that time. Anything could have happened to me—things were so tough when I was growing up but God kept on protecting me.

Even when I came to Durban and all the journeys that I have taken to Malawi, God was there for me. You know when we reached Westridge, I was grateful [for the church]. I was not a [churchgoer] but believed in God. When we were growing up our uncle did not want us to go to church. If you ever went to church, he would beat you up until you were flat on the floor. It was as if you had gone and slept with a man. He did not believe in these things because he believed in ancestors.

When I got to Newlands—and I always say that things happen for a reason—Fathima started loving church. She joined the Seventh Day Adventist Church. She met with these people who keep the Sabbath. She looked up to them and she started following them and she believed.

I also liked them. They groomed me in getting to know God. They had sessions that dealt with issues like forgiveness. It was so hard for me to forgive my mother because of the way she treated me, even when I had grown up. She has never loved me, Gcina. I always wondered what was wrong with my blood. When I wanted to find out about my father, she never wanted me to know who my father was. So I said I would go to the programme called Khumbul'ekhaya and say that I am trying to find my father. Then that's when she started trying to explain that she also does not know my father. She did not know





his name. This means that he changed his name, you know what I mean. So we started looking for my father until we found him. Unfortunately, I only found him in December and he died in January.

Gcina: Which year?

Busisiwe: In 2015.

Gcina: This means you met him in 2015?

Busisiwe: I did not even meet with him. We spoke on the phone. I even told him how my mother hated me. I wondered what he had done to her.

I asked him what he did. When I spoke with him he told me that my mother was *isigebengu* [thief]. When I called him, I realised that ... my father did not know the name of my mother. He knew her by another name that even we did not know then. Had I found my father alone, I would tell him that I am the daughter of this person and he would not know the name. He would wonder what I was talking about.

When I told him about the other name of my mother then he recognised me. He told me that he knew me and he had been looking for me for a long time. He told me that he used to pay maintenance for me and buy formula and everything else. He went and tried to pay for damages in a house that he did not know—which was probably not her real home. By the time he got there she was nowhere to be found. He did not know where to look for me. I only spoke to him over the phone and that's it. He told me that I should come to him.

Gcina: Did he give you the address?

Busisiwe: No, but we were in contact with him as well as my stepmother. I am in contact with her, as well as my half-brothers and half-sisters. It's only that we have never met and sat down together. Although he is gone, my stepmother does call and ask how we are doing. She encourages us to visit but says that right now they do not have enough space. And I would say we will come one day when things are alright.

So that is how I received Christ and that's when I had to forgive. But it was hard. I learnt a lot. It was another journey. I tried to forgive her and it was okay. Even my half-sister and brother—I love them, Gcina—even when they get sick, I bring them to Durban. But when things are not going so well for me there is no one that I can turn into.

Gcina: Are you now referring to the children of your mother?

Busisiwe: Yes, the ones she got from her marriage, the ones that come after me—a girl and a boy. She had two kids in her marriage.

Gcina: Who are they?

Busisiwe: Nontusuze and noMkholi. Yes, she had them in her marriage and I later took them to Durban. I found Vusi a job at Game City. But he is in the rural areas now. He stopped working and went back home. I helped pay for the school fees for my sister's child, from Grade 1 to Grade 12, but she does not even call me.

Gcina: Which sister?

Busisiwe: Nontsuzze. While I worked at Blue Lagoon, I paid for her school fees and transport until she reached Grade 12. Then on the 14th I lost my job. My mother had not been working for about a year.

Gcina: This means that she was getting her pension?

Busisiwe: She had not received it. She got her money on the 14th and nobody has even told me that.

Gcina: The same date that you lost your job?

Busisiwe: Yes, the same day I lost my job. So you see how God works? I lost my job on 14 October and my mother got R 270 000. But my mother has never sat down with me and [talked to me about the money





she received]. It was a Friday when that happened. I got a phone call from Vusi that night asking me if I heard that my mother got money. By that time, he was still here in Durban and he had stopped working. I told him that I had not heard. I asked him how much she got and he said it was about R 270 000.

Gcina: Vusi was in Durban?

Busisiwe: Yes, we were all here in Durban.

Gcina: Did you live together?

Busisiwe: Vusi had a woman who was the mother of his child and they lived at Lindelani. I stayed at Kenville in a flat. Zuweka stayed at Newlands, renting. I did not get along with Zuweka anymore because I was no longer working and I did not have an income. You know, when you do not have anything anymore, your family tends to look down upon you.

So my mother got her money on the Friday and the following Monday night she came to Durban. My son met her at the Durban Station at 11pm. He then paid for a car to take them to the flat and paid R100 for her accommodation.

Gcina: Who's flat?

Busisiwe: My son's flat. She slept there and on Tuesday morning my son brought her to me. Let me tell you that on that particular Tuesday I met with her at the door because I was coming from the CCMA as I was still attending my case. When I met her, she told me that she was rushing to go and she wanted to go see Vusi. This means that she was just using my room as a waiting room. She knew exactly where she wanted to go. She went, Gcina, and came back with all of her kids and their kids—only Zuweka was left behind. I am sure she was irritated by the fact that my mother was using her space. She thought maybe my mother was going to give me money.

Let me tell that she and Vusi used to drink alcohol every day and spend not less than R500 every day, from Monday to Sunday. When she had to do groceries, she would buy a 2kg braai pack and chicken feet and she would make sure that whatever she bought was finished on the same day.

Gcina: Does she now live here in Durban?

Busisiwe: No, she is trying to deal with Vusi's issues. Most of his stuff was taken away as he was owing people and he had a lot of debt.

I also have debt plus R2000 in outstanding fees owed to the Christian High School from last year November. My child used to wake up early every morning at 5am and go to school so that by the time the teacher who stood at the gate came, she would be already inside. And my mother was alive and she was busy boxing the R 270 000.

Gcina: So they closed the gate for those who have not paid school fees?

Busisiwe: Yes. I really don't understand that school. They said that if you have a problem, you must come forward and talk to the teachers. But still our children were badly treated. At some stage, I wanted to go to the Department of Education but then I stopped because I realised that my child might have receive negative treatment. I really do not understand why the child has to suffer. I sent her to the school until I could no longer afford to pay the school fees because I was not working anymore. They understood but still you find that they make her stand outside and they get chased outside. Vusi is now left with the grandchild, a girl.

Gcina: Did he take the mother of the child?

Busisiwe: No, the mother did not go. The daughter of my sister left during holidays for the rural areas.

The daughter of my sister is the one to keep my mother's money. They all went to the rural areas.

Gcina: Which one is that?





Busisiwe: The one I helped educate.

Gcina: Who is she?

Busisiwe: Svenathi. She is the one who is responsible for the finances of her grandmother. I do not have anything to do with it. When I said, let's talk about money, she would say she didn't want to hear anything. Gcina, you know how stressed I was because I was owing so many people for rent, school fees. I was so frustrated. I could not even sleep at night for thinking of my debts. I did not even know if I would reach that December. Sometimes I would stand at the window and wish to throw myself out of it. Then I would think of what would happen to my two children—I did not even care anymore about Yusef because he was now grown up and even has a wife. But I knew he could not afford to take care of my business [problems]. I just kept quiet. I was so stressed. I would pray until I could not even pray anymore. I could not even sleep anymore. And then it all passed—I don't know how—but it all passed through God.

When December came and when people were eating Choice Assorted [biscuits] we were eating rice with cucumber and knorrox only. My children persevered through all that. My boyfriend in Cape Town paid the R3000 school fees owing at school. He used to say the child must go write exams and she did it everything went alright.

Gcina: What Grade is she doing?

Busisiwe: Grade 12. I have heard that my mother from the rural areas has not been getting her monthly allowance and now she wants to go rent because she did not want to stay at home. This child used to fly up and down together with my brother Vusi.

Gcina: Doing what?

Busisiwe: When she visited her boyfriend in Cape Town, she would fly. Vusi would do the same thing when coming to the mother of his child. They would be spending my mother's money at a time when we were stuck here without food. I stayed and I decided to talk to God about this. I said no matter what situations I am experiencing, my God, you know. Nobody used to call me or make any form of contact; nobody who will reach you when you are going through difficult times. When anybody said: "Long time, no see" I would just keep quiet without responding. But I told my heart that God has to give me a forgiving heart, that I do not hate them. Like I said, I am now involved with this one. He also has his family but he is trying to accommodate us as well.

Gcina: When did this one come back to your life, because it seems as if you used to date him long ago?

Busisiwe: Yes, he came back in August, if I am not mistaken.

Gcina: Last year?

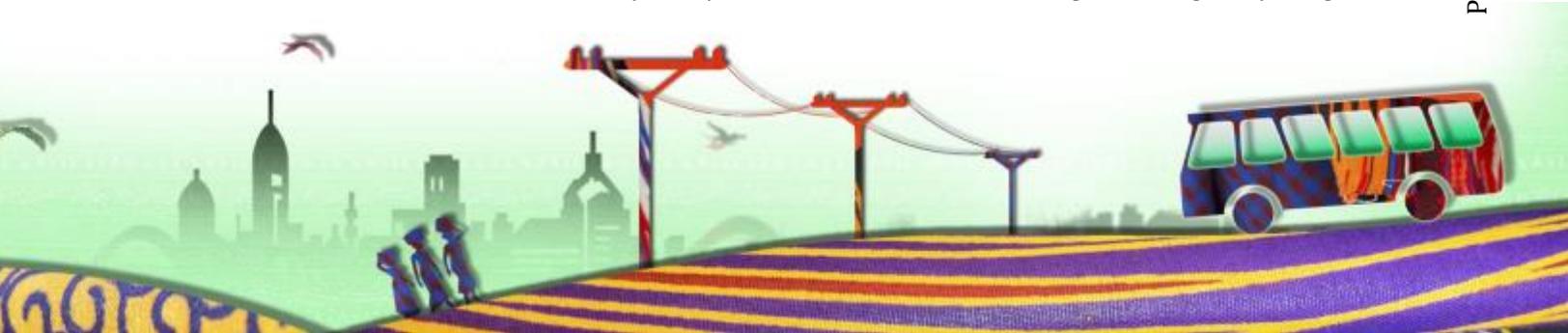
Busisiwe: Yes. The reason I like him is because he has never said anything about having sex with me since we are back together. I have not been to Cape Town—you will never believe that. He also did not leave me when I lost my job. He has not forsaken me even for one day. He gives me whatever he has to pay my daughter's school fees and he has never said that I should pay it back.

Gcina: I see.

Busisiwe: Even in the situation that I am in, I am in arrears for rent and he said he will pay half and we will see again later how we put the money together so that we will be able to pay everything that we owe. At least I thank God for him. I wonder what I would do if there was no one.

Gcina: Please remind me why you left Newlands.

Busisiwe: I did not like that place. As I explained to you, even if you carry a Pick'nPay packet with stones inside, people would kill you for that. Secondly, as I am Xhosa. They keep on calling us Mpondos. They are racist most of the times. Thirdly, the place we lived had a lot of drugs, whoonga. My daughter





started making friends with the wrong people. There is this specific girl who has a child and is my daughter's friend and she is also a high school drop-out. She spends most of the time in the house where they sell whoonga. I went and spoke to her parent and said my child had a lot of household chores and should not stay long in their home. She took advantage of the fact that we worked [crazy shifts] in restaurants. I told her to chase her away and said that I do the same thing when they come to my house and they know it. I really chase them away and I ask what is wrong in their households that they should come stay at my house. That woman would say that she does not call anybody to come to her house therefore she would not be chasing anybody away. What I noticed with her was that all her children were already destroyed so she did not want the other children to progress. So I realised that my child does not listen anymore. She knows where all the big bashes are happening. One day, the way Fathima was becoming, I went to look for her inside the taxis that have disco lights. I realised that I just had to leave that area.

Gcina: Where did you go when you left?

Busisiwe: Kenville.

Gcina: How is life there?

Busisiwe: It's fine, I don't want to lie, because there are no black people. I live with Indians. Nobody cares about you or what you are doing at what time. The life of my child has changed as well because before then she was also failing at school. She was not doing many things right. Now she is back at school; she spends time in the house; the shop is nearby; she does not have excuses to go anywhere. This place is a bit isolated. We are living our own lives.

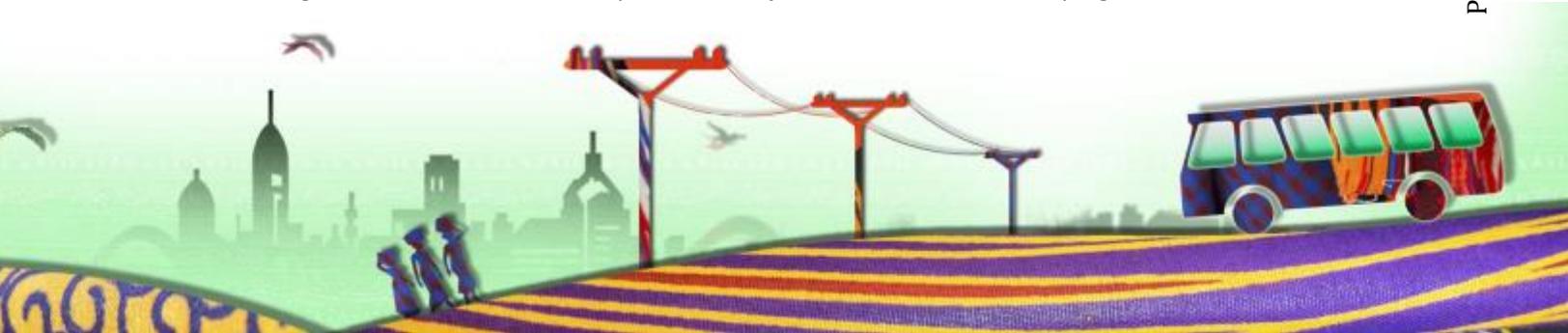
Gcina: You spoke about how you feel discriminated in Durban. Would you say that it is better to live in such places as this one?

Busisiwe: It's better in these places. In black communities you find that you are accused of witchcraft. Even when people do not have proof, they just act on that. So you have to think about your life. I have spent most of my life living in places like these and I have felt safe.

You know, when I started living in Westridge, I saw a big difference between living with black people and the other races. Even now, I am thinking about moving to Cape Town. When I go there, I will also try not to live with black people. I realised that there are many things which are not right in our communities and which we must avoid. Even in terms of how we raise our kids, you find that we love them so much that we don't even draw a line (discipline them).

Like Yusef, he is old now and he has had to go out and stand on his feet. So he got married. It is important for me to see him being independent so that if he falls down I can support him. If I am still alive, I would be able to help him. It's not that I am chasing him away. We black people like to take care of our kids until they become very old. They would even have kids while they are still at home. Then you would find that there is a lot of fighting in the house, and people are always at each other's throats. Imagine what would be happening with Yusef had I still been living with him here? You know, he got married while he was living with me. I called him and he said he was married now and he was still doing in-service training. That was in January. In September, because I had heard some rumours, I quickly said to him: "My son, even before this thing arrives (baby) please plan for it (move out), because I would not like you and your wife and children to be having quarrels [with the rest of the family because of the limited space]." I said: "You don't want to be caught in the middle between your siblings and your wife. Secondly, you must learn to be independent while I am still alive."

Gcina, I am not saying that you must chase the child away from the house. Once the child starts working, make sure that he is independent and just monitor how he is coping. Don't be satisfied with





living with your child when he does not even contribute in the house. How can you complain as a parent, because this is your child? You find that you are doing everything as a parent—you are the one who is killing your own. You know I have spoken to a lot of parents at Westridge. I have kept on asking them how they live with their working kids? People have this tendency of having an outside building for the kids and they do not pay rent. The parent complains about the electricity; he does not even buy groceries in the house—why is he staying for free? What kind of a life is it that he wakes up every morning to go to work and you are complaining? What kind of a life is that?

My kids know very well. I told even Yusef that I educated him at DUT. I gave him bread that I will never take away from him. I told him that he does not have anything to do with my house. I always tell Fathima that she needs to use this opportunity of getting educated while I am still alive. I tell her that I am giving her bread for tomorrow—I am giving her the future. I tell her that whatever I have I will keep for the small boy because I do not know where he will be when I die. I would have given Yusef and Fathima something that they can survive on.

Here in South Africa, education is key. This means that one has to work very hard and not waste time. We [black people] are scared to tell our children the truth. For example, I have a friend who has four kids and all of them have children of their own. You can see if you are visiting them you even get embarrassed because diapers are all over the place. You ask her: “Where can I sit [because there is no place]?” I would ask her that since her children have more than one child each, who takes care of them? Who buys diapers? And when she comes back from her domestic jobs, she finds that they have not cooked or cleaned. I would ask her why is she spoiling the kids like these when they are so old? Sometimes they live in with their girlfriends and there would be extra plates in the house.

Gcina: Girls come and stay over at their boyfriends’ house?

Busisiwe: Yes, they would stay over and they became married women whose *lobolo* has not even been paid. Eish, I can never understand that environment.

Gcina: So when you say you are going to move to Cape Town, you plan to get a job over there?

Busisiwe: I have said to myself that I would not like to work anymore. When I became a believer, I looked at Joseph being sold by his brother and I thought who was I to complain to God? I know that God has a purpose for everything. So when I said I was selling my house, then my family started being interested in my issues. But I am really glad that when I was building that house I did not receive any support from them.

Gcina: How were they getting interested?

Busisiwe: They wanted a way through Yusef. They tried to convince him that he should not agree that I sell the house, because this is what they have their eyes on as they are in Durban. I told you that my mother has finished the R 270 000 in two months. They have never built anything except the slab/foundation. She is the only one who does not have a house at home, you hear what I am saying, Gcina? She is busy with alcohol and she gave her money to her kids and grandchildren. I heard that the granddaughter took R2000 and went and fixed her teeth... She wants me to take Yusef and Vusi to go and stay there for free. That’s why I want to sell it so that it does not even exist [as an option]. Another thing I wanted to do with this house ... is start my own business. I really don’t care how much I can get out of the house. All I am asking for is for God to be the foundation of this thing [the business I want to start]. But I need the guidance of the Lord. The problem is that when we as black people have money, we like to show off with that and do all those things. This does not make sense. I do not like that thing. My mother finished R270 000 before she did anything with it. So I am continuing with the sale of the





house because I want to climb up the ladder. I may be crying today but one day my tears will be wiped away.

Gcina: Thank you for your time, Busisiwe. I started thinking that perhaps you changed your mind [about giving this interview] (Both laugh).

Busisiwe: No, I was not going to change my mind. I would not do that.

Gcina: The reason why I was interested to hear your story is because perhaps you would provide a different perspective from the people who come from other countries. Sometimes you find that their stories are almost the same. They all talk about the xenophobia blah, blah, blah. But now I have been able to capture the way that you see work and the way you understand South Africans when you are also a South African. Perhaps another person from outside the country would be scared to tell it as it is, and think that I would feel bad about all that. But that would just be the way she thinks because people are not the same.

Gcina: People are not the same.

Busisiwe: Even at work when you get a promotion—for example, when I worked at Durban North—there was that thing where they said they were led by an Mpondo. You see, Gcina, there is something that I have seen.

Gcina: You have worked at Durban North?

Busisiwe: Hayibo! That's where I am coming from. When I left Sparks Overport, I went to the Bluff. I left voluntarily because, as a born-again Christian, there are things I could sacrifice.

Gcina: What was happening at Bluff?

Busisiwe: Again I had lived through a lot of difficult times [*ukuhlukomezeka*]. Big time! Unfortunately, in most of the places where I have worked, the manager has really liked me—I don't know why. I would just get there and then people would think I got too close with my employer. There was a time where I was even fasting about it. One particular girl would intimidate me and swear at me for the whole day. One day I even broke my fasting and I held her with my own hands. But I was not fired there: I resigned. My employer looked for another place for me to work which was in Durban North because there was a Wimpy which had opened in Broadway. So I went and worked there.

Gcina: That means you did a good job for him.

Busisiwe: Yes, because even in Broadway I started having the same problem after working there for a while. I left there and went to Chicken Licken and I was there for about three months before I became a manager. Then that was when I realised that there is anointing in me but it was not easy for me to see that in me. I only saw that when I started being a believer. Even David was anointed while he was a shepherd. After he was anointed he went back into being a shepherd. He was 17 years old. So even with me, it may happen that I had to experience all my journeys so that I know how it feels to be there, but that it was now time for me to stand up on my own feet.

Gcina: So now how are you surviving since you do not have a job?

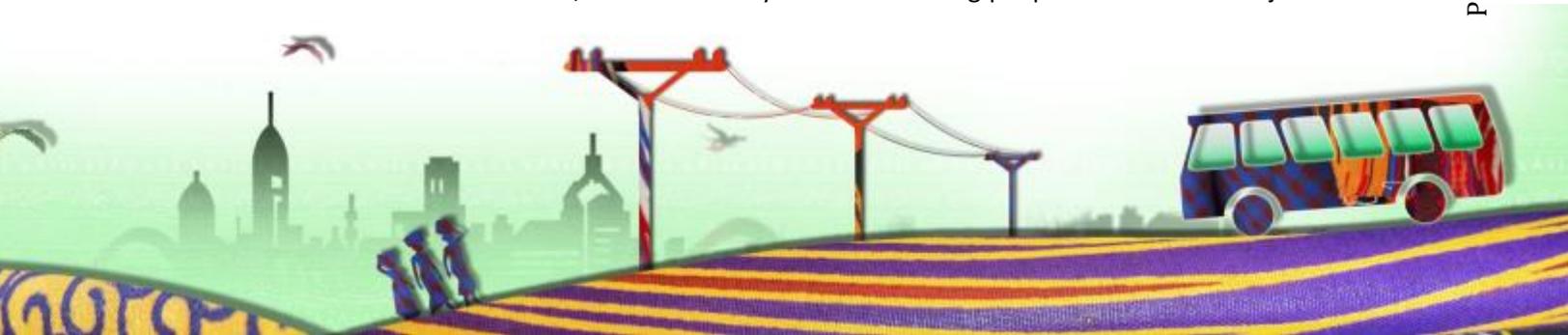
Busisiwe: Right now, the people who live at my Newlands house are renting at R4000 a month. I am able to make a living for that amount but the one (boyfriend) who is in Cape Town gives me whatever he can.

Gcina: Where does the boy work?

Busisiwe: He works in a company called Dtlase, here at Westville. They do electricity.

Gcina: He studied to work in electricity?

Busisiwe: He studied for electricity at DUT for four years. He did in-service training in some company. Eh, I thank God because last week, he told me they were retrenching people at work. He had just had a





baby when he told me. He started in January and told me not to worry anymore about paying school fees for my daughter.

Gcina: Your last-born?

Busisiwe: Yes, the girl who is doing Grade 12.

Gcina: How many kids do you have?

Busisiwe: There are three of them. You didn't know how many kids I have?

Gcina: Yes. There are three of them, so he is not the last-born?

Busisiwe: The one who is doing Grade 12? [The last-born] is the one who is doing Grade 7.

Gcina: Please count them for me.

Busisiwe: Yusef is the oldest; then there is Fathima; the small one is Linda. Linda is the last one.

Gcina: Oh, so you have two school-going kids?

Busisiwe: That is why the issue was hot when I heard that they were retrenchments. When he was working for Rainbow, my boy phoned and said that they are being given letters of retrenchment. I was so stressed. He asked me to pray for him. I said: "Eh, I will not pray today. I have prayed before and it is those prayers which will help you." I told him that he would not be retrenched.

But when I got home I really felt stressed—you know the games that the devil plays. It was tricky for him because he already has a family.

At that time, I did not understand what was happening in my life, this house was already with an agent and I did not even understand what would happen or what was happening for two months.

I sent a message to my child who wanted to carry the load all on his own. I told him that he must not be stressed—no matter what happens he should not be stressed. I knew this was going to be difficult because he was already used to having a salary and he had just gotten a promotion two months before that so that he was now earning R15 000. He told me that retrenchments were going to start on Monday. Gcina, I was fasting for four days. On the fourth day, a Thursday when I have a women's prayer meeting, he called me in the evening and I was thinking that he would say he had been retrenched but he said: "Mom, I was not retrenched. I survived this one." You will not believe the noise I made, screaming, saying: "Jehova, you are a good God and you know your people." So my child is the one who buys food on the 25th. Then sometimes he would pay schools fees. The grant money pays for their bus fare. That is how I am surviving right now.

But I was irritated with the agent I used [to sell the house]. I tried to find another agent because I really did not understand this process. They said that there is a place where I can sign saying how much I am selling the house for. Yesterday they called and said I must come at 10 tomorrow so that we can finalise some stuff. I assume that there are people who have shown interest in the house.

Gcina: So now that I have heard your story, where does Zarina come into play since I know there is Yusef and Fathima?

Busisiwe: You know how Zarina enters the picture? The time I worked at the Blue Lagoon, I started dating Ebrahim, a white person who loved me. He said if I wanted him to help me I had to convert to Islam and be "Zarina" so that people wouldn't mind and he could help me. He explained that this is how they as Muslims helped each other. So I gave myself a name for that time and Ebrahim was really happy and he was able to help me.

Gcina: This means that you were doing the Zarina thing for the sake of getting assistance?

Busisiwe: Yes, but he used to love me. He would even do birthday parties for my kids at Overport and he would leave us at the shop (Laughs). I remember the time when I lost all my stuff at Clare Estate and Mohammed had stopped paying rent—he didn't pay for three months and he got involved with the





caretaker. They took all my stuff: sofas, TV, radio, DVD. They told me they would sell all of them in order to get back money for rent. At that time Ebrahim didn't want any more (*ukwenzani*). He wrote me a check for a lawyer and I started a case procedure. I won the case and all my stuff was returned. Ebrahim even contributed to the house I bought. I was supposed to pay R 5 523. He used to tell me to leave the tills during the weekends and he used to give me money to pay for the house.

Gcina: Did you really do the conversion?

Busisiwe: I never really converted. I just did it for Ebrahim because they always said I should convert. I didn't want to convert. One should not live a life when you are trying to impress other people. You must keep yourself happy.

Gcina: Hawu! This was really helpful—thank you—although you even got hungry [in this process].

Busisiwe: It does not matter, Gcina. I know what is it to struggle.

