



**Interview with:** Sizeni (23)  
**Interviewed by:** Nomkhosi  
**Date of interview:** 8 December 2016  
**Travel:** Mkomaas - Durban

**Sizeni:** My name is Sizeni. I am from MKomaas. I was born eMkhunya, near Phuzekhemisi's (famous late Maskandi singer) home.

**Nomkhosi:** Do you know him personally?

**Sizeni:** Phuzekhemisi? I know even the inside of his family home. But we have since moved from there. My father passed away while we were living there and when we moved, we were left with just my mom. We have a home at Mahlongwa now. That is Mahlongwa at kwaNobantu, just before Mandawo. What brought me here to the city is that I had a child. I had him when I was 21 years old and his father rejected me. So that meant I had to come here to work for my child. At that time there was no child grant. So I had to come here to work [to feed and clothe him] because his father rejected me. He (the child's father) passed away a few years ago when I was already here at Thokoza. He had another wife that he got married to.

**Nomkhosi:** Was he ever responsible for his child?

**Sizeni:** He was never, not even once.

**Nomkhosi:** Does he know his father?

**Sizeni:** Yes, he knew him but I gave him my surname because I did not get married to him.

**Nomkhosi:** Is it a boy or a girl?

**Sizeni:** It's a boy. How could he take his father's surname when his father did not even pay one cow?

**Nomkhosi:** Some boys like to change their names on their own.

**Sizeni:** Mine won't change his. Even my granddaughter knows his father's surname. However, she has been given her mother's surname. But in time, she will change to the surname that her father is using. They belong in my household. [My son] will never change. What good did they do? Why would I give them my child?

**Nomkhosi:** How old is he?

**Sizeni:** He is 34 years old.

**Nomkhosi:** Has he really never raised the issue with changing surnames? Most boys do that.

**Sizeni:** No. He uses my surname even now as he lives in my family house. The granddaughter is 14 years old now.

**Nomkhosi:** You have such grown-ups.

**Sizeni:** The grandchild is 14 and my boy was born in 1982.

**Nomkhosi:** He is in my age group. I was born in 1981.

**Sizeni:** This is the thing that brought me here to the city. When I came I started working at Umlazi, and then I went to work at Overport in 1984.

**Nomkhosi:** You didn't wait for long after giving birth.

**Sizeni:** Remember, I gave birth in 1982 and I only moved to Durban in 1983.

**Nomkhosi:** You left baby with gogo?

**Sizeni:** I left the baby when he was almost three years old with my mother. She was not working. You know how the women from long ago never used to work. They used to stay at home and were taken care of by a husband.





**Nomkhosi:** Your father used to work?

**Sizeni:** Yes, he used to work but he also ended up not working. By the time I came here to work he was no longer working. He used to build people's houses in the rural areas and that's how he made a living. He would also repair broken houses. And then I came here to the city.

**Nomkhosi:** Is it your mom who said you should come and work?

**Sizeni:** *Nganyenya* (I sneaked out). It was never allowed in those days for young women to go and work even if the first potential husband does not do right [by marrying you]. I was already his fiancé as I did not get pregnant while I was in school. Parents would say that perhaps I could find another one who could take me and make me a wife. But I thought that I would like my son to [be provided for] like everyone else. So because the father had deserted me, I had to come here and work for my child.

**Nomkhosi:** How you did sneak out of your house to come here?

**Sizeni:** I sneaked out without the permission of my parents. I just left the house without saying anything. I knew someone who said that she found me a job at Freekom in Umkomaas. So together we planned that I would wear [everyday] clothes and take a bucket down to the river. In the bucket were my other clothes. When I reached the river, I changed the clothes. I left the bucket and the old clothes and I left. We knew where we were going to meet.

**Nomkhosi:** Was this your friend?

**Sizeni:** It was actually a sister of mine, someone from my family. She already had a job. My parents were never going to allow me to go work.

**Nomkhosi:** And your baby?

**Sizeni:** I left him with my parents to be raised at home.

**Nomkhosi:** Does he know that you are real his mom?

**Sizeni:** He knows me very well. I didn't come back for three months at first. When I came back my baby thought that my mom was his mom. But after that I came back home often, and my child knows me very well. I now live with him in my home. He knows I am his mother. I came to work for him. I wanted him to live a better life so I came here to the city. Then I did not even know how to sew. Now I have my own overlocking machines and there is nothing that I cannot do. I also did not even go to school to learn this.

**Nomkhosi:** Let's go back to when you first arrived at Umlazi.

**Sizeni:** When I started at Umlazi I worked and worked and I used to get paid R20 a month.

**Nomkhosi:** Were you working at somebody's house?

**Sizeni:** I was working at somebody's house as a nanny, taking care of a baby.

**Nomkhosi:** For R20 per month?

**Sizeni:** Yes, I got paid R20 a month. This was in 1983. Then I got another job at Overport for R25 a month. I worked on Sparks Road in Overport.

**Nomkhosi:** Where did you live while you worked there?

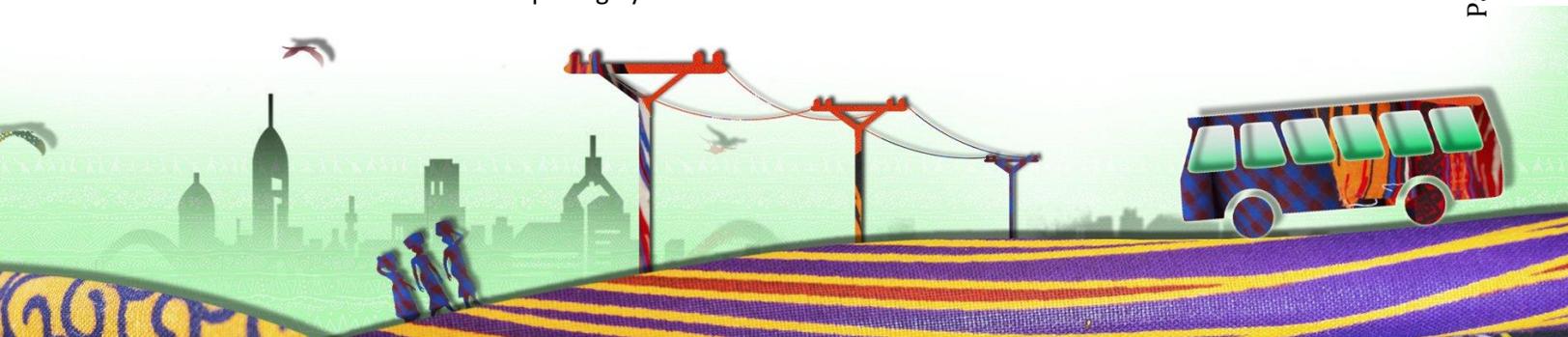
**Sizeni:** Well, when you worked for the Indians, you would live with them, you would sleep on the veranda.

**Nomkhosi:** Outside?

**Sizeni:** Indians made you sleep at the veranda outside, but when it was raining they would let you come in and sleep behind the sofa like a dog. Remember that they used to say that we are stinking and they hated us.

[Interjection from a neighbour: That's the veranda where they keep flowers. I also used to sleep there when I was working for the Indian people.]

**Sizeni:** The veranda was like a passage you walked in.





**Nomkhosi:** Yes, the veranda is an open space.

**Sizeni:** It's like a passage and it would have a wall on one side. It would be long, so if it was raining, if there was wind, the rain would reach you.

**Nomkhosi:** This is where you slept every night?

**Sizeni:** Yes, but if there was rain and it was windy, they would feel sorry for you and they would bring you inside their dining room and you would sleep close to the door, behind the sofa. They would hide you there because they did not want people to see that you were there.

I left Overport and came to the city centre and started living in Smith Street at Bulden House. I found people who did sewing there and I eventually learnt how to do sewing as well. I did not study for it: I just saw people doing it and I eventually learnt as well. I left Smith Street and I came to this home [Thokoza]. I actually can't remember exactly when I arrived here, but I have been here for a very long time. I think it may have been when my grandchild was nearly two years old. She is now 14, I think. She was already born by the time I came to live at Thokoza.

**Nomkhosi:** Has your son ever worked?

**Sizeni:** My son, he used to work as a taxi conductor. He had casual jobs.

**Nomkhosi:** Was this in the rural areas or here?

**Sizeni:** No, it was here in the city. He worked in taxis going to Umbilo. He used to live at Mayville. One day he was beaten up by people and his head hit a concrete floor. Some *mthambos* (bones) got disturbed and he could not hear. Then the doctor gave him a disability grant and he just decided to stay and home and have this pension. He went to many hospitals and he could not get helped. Nobody could detect where the problem was, but in those days, it was really difficult because he almost could not hear at all. When you spoke to him you had to scream and he would also scream back at you. But now I am able to sit down with him and have a decent chat. It happens sometimes that he does not hear and he says: "Hey, mom, I did not hear you." So he gets a disability grant. But he is still young and is able to work. He does housework in the rural areas and he is fine.

**Nomkhosi:** How did he get beaten up at Mayville?

**Sizeni:** How can I put this? He met with people who were drunk, or he was the one who was drunk. The people were actually his friends. He started telling them jokes and did not stop even when they were no longer interested. He did not know they were irritable like they were coming from a funeral. They just slapped him and beat him. As you know, when a person is drunk, he is easy to push around. He went and fell on the concrete in the road and that where things went wrong.

**Nomkhosi:** He did not have a problem before that?

**Sizeni:** He did not have any problems before. He went to a lot of hospitals but [they couldn't help him] and now he is getting a disability pension.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is the sister who left home with you when you sneaked out?

**Sizeni:** She passed away. She was from my family, from the same surname.

**Nomkhosi:** Was she older than you?

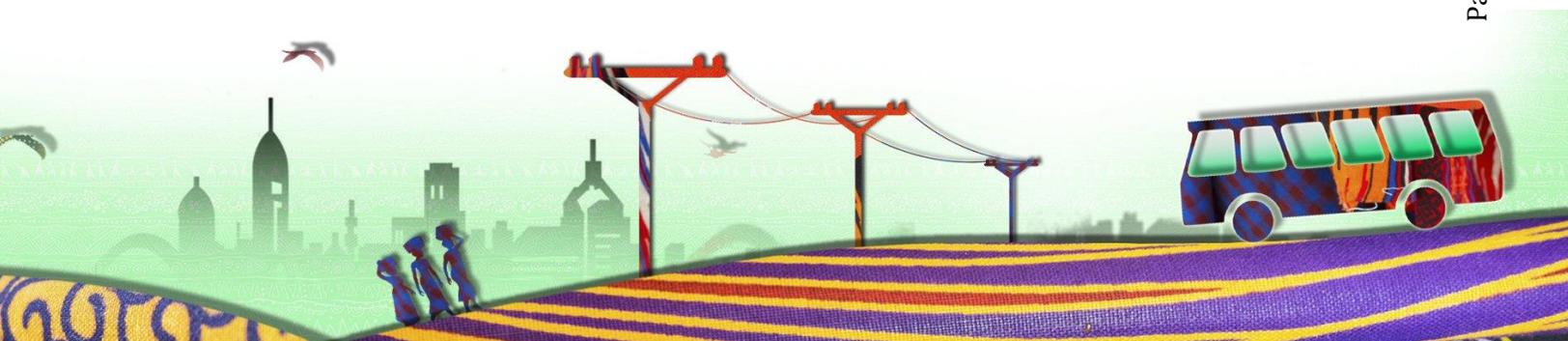
**Sizeni:** Yes, she was older than me.

**Nomkhosi:** Was she sick?

**Sizeni:** Yes, she fell sick and died. She was already married into the Dlamini family.

**Nomkhosi:** You were involved with the same family?

**Sizeni:** Yes, we were married into the same family. Most of us had wanted to get married into this family. You know, if your sister was getting married and you were attending one of those ceremonies, you





would be noticed by one guy from that family and he would like you. That's how it was. Most of us would have boyfriends from the same family.

**Nomkhosi:** Do you still have parents?

**Sizeni:** They all died.

**Nomkhosi:** Your boy is the one responsible for the home now?

**Sizeni:** Yes, he is and he lives with his daughter.

**Nomkhosi:** Only his daughter?

**Sizeni:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is the mother of the daughter?

**Sizeni:** They broke up. You know that I had my child when I was 21 years old. My child also had his daughter when he was 21. The child was her mother's first child as well. When my child had that accident, they were still involved. But she was [swayed] by people who asked her why she was involved with a person who does not hear properly and so they broke up. But today she wishes that they could get back together. Also our home was very ugly (in poor repair) at that time. I fixed it and now it is good. Now she wishes to come back but there is no way she can come back.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is she from?

**Sizeni:** She is from Mahlongwa.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is that? Oh, where you live?

**Sizeni:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** Does she still stay in that area?

**Sizeni:** Yes. She even has other children from other relationships. She has two kids coming after my granddaughter, each from a different father.

**Nomkhosi:** So how did you arrange for the granddaughter to come and live with you?

**Sizeni:** We paid for everything.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, okay.

**Sizeni:** We paid for *ingezamuzi* (damages payment to the mother's family as the grandchild was born out of wedlock) and we came back to pay for the two cows *umqhoyiso neyesephulo* (damages payment to the mother of the grandchild). That is our child now. Now we only need to buy the surname so that she can change it. A girl child needs to be bought with two cows where I come from, that is, if you want her surname to be changed to her father's.

**Nomkhosi:** Two more in addition to what you have already paid?

**Sizeni:** Yes, that would be to change the surname from her mother's surname to our surname. We would be buying her.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, so the cow for *ukuqhoyisa* is used to buy the child?

**Sizeni:** No, it is for damages. *Umqhoyiso* is for her mother. *Isephulo* is for her father. We paid with live cows (*izinkomo zihamba ngezinyawo*). Now we have to pay the two remaining cows so that she can change the surname from Mngwenwe to our surname, Masoka.

**Nomkhosi:** Okay, let's go back to your life at the hostel.

**Sizeni:** I was brought here by two women whom I met, but they are no longer here at Thokoza. One was MamNguni. We used to sell together in the same place, a place called Juliana. I used to say to them that I rent at Bulden (big den) and it was expensive. So they helped me by trying to find me a bed here. I came to this hostel when it was R 17.50 per month. In this place you had to be the *imbamba* (one who is hosted) of somebody else. You would be registered as the *imbamba* of the person who brought





you and you would be here officially. And one day I would also be allocated my own bed. But when I came I did not have a bed and I slept on the floor.

**Nomkhosi:** So that is how you started as well?

**Sizeni:** Yes, that's how I started. You had to have a friend whom you would be lodging with.

**Nomkhosi:** Did you have such a friend?

**Sizeni:** Yes, but they are no longer here.

**Nomkhosi:** Where did they go?

**Sizeni:** MamNguni, who brought me here, had a daughter who bought her a house near eMatendeni [at Inanda]. So I started by living with her. I was her *mbamba* and that is how you are referred to in this place. You live with them, but you are also registered on your own. As this person was paying R17.50 you would have to pay something too though less than that. You are not *masitende* (the owner of the bed) then, that is, somebody who possesses a bed. As I have a bed now, I am *masitende* in this place. When I am under someone, I am called that person's *imbamba*. So eventually I became *umasitende* when I was allocated my own bed.

**Nomkhosi:** How long did it take you to become *masitende*?

**Sizeni:** Eh, I am not sure. It is difficult to know these things because we did not go to school. We did not note the dates. We just experienced things as they happened. I was here before, in Room 79. When I was left alone, I always locked the door. The matron used to open the door and say: "What did I say to you? Did I not tell you to leave this place?"

**Nomkhosi:** But you used to pay your dues.

**Sizeni:** Lodgers were not wanted in this place. I used to lock the door because I knew that she did not have a key. Sometimes I would close the door and forget to lock it and she would open the door slowly and say: "What did I say to you? Did I not tell you to leave this place?" I would shiver.

**Nomkhosi:** What was she?

**Sizeni:** She was the matron of this place. Her name was MaMthembu. You would only have rest when she left you and went to other rooms.

**Nomkhosi:** When did she leave this place?

**Sizeni:** It could have been three or four years ago—not long.

**Nomkhosi:** Did she treat all people like that?

**Sizeni:** Eh, I do not know what she did in the other rooms. I only know what she did when she came to this room. That is why I used to lock myself inside most of the time. When she would come I would sit on the bed and just keep quiet as if was not there. I knew who had copies of the keys. She knew everyone there—those who were allocated rooms and those who were lodgers. You would never fool around with that.

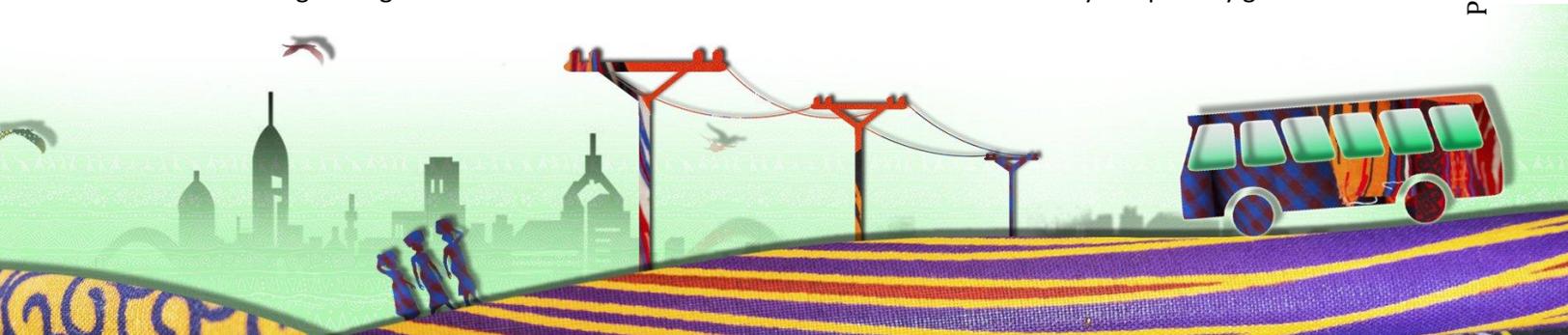
**Nomkhosi:** Where did she go when she left this place?

**Sizeni:** She retired.

**Nomkhosi:** Was she very old?

**Sizeni:** Not too old. [She started working when she was very young. I came here when Mthimkhulu was responsible for this place and the matron was white. When I came here, Caroline and Benedicta were still young girls.]

Now when I came I found that there was this crew that used to do sewing and would sell t-shirts and tracksuits. When we worked together, we would help each other find spaces, which is how I got here. The lady who brought me here had a daughter who used to live here. Her daughter fell pregnant and left to go and give birth. Kids were not allowed here at that time. So this lady temporarily gave me her





daughter's space. I ended up being her daughter's *imbamba*. Finally I got allocated a bed so that I could become *umasitende*.

You see, I left my home so that I would be able to take care of my baby. When events happened here, people would note that your child is fatherless and does not have decent clothes. I came to work for that child so that people would not see that he was rejected by his father. Today he is a grown-up.

As I said, I don't have parents; I only have that child and the grandchild. There are many things that I still need and many things that I still want to achieve. That is why I am still living here at Thokoza. However, I do have my home and there is no problem about. I also have a boyfriend who is in Sterina House.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is Sterina house?

**Sizeni:** Across the road. The problem is that I can't go back home yet because I have not done everything I wanted to do at home. That's why I am still here. I am still working. One day when I do not have the strength to go on, at least I know that I have a home. Even if I do not get somebody who will marry me, there is no problem because I have a home. I have just returned from visiting home. I have been back for a week now.

**Nomkhosi:** You were visiting?

**Sizeni:** I go home often. I go anytime I want to—I just go. You would think I am crazy sometimes. I could go on a Friday and come back on Saturday because I always want to come back and work for my kids. I am a hawker. I post things back to them.

**Nomkhosi:** So what kinds of jobs do you do now?

**Sizeni:** I sew tracksuits, t-shirts, shorts, skirts, pillows, continental pillows and cushions. When I have my stock, it covers my bed and I do not even get a space to sleep. Sometimes I sleep on a sponge on the floor.

**Nomkhosi:** So you can use a sewing machine?

**Sizeni:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** You do not do beadwork?

**Sizeni:** No, I have not started doing beadwork. I did a lot of that while I lived in the rural areas—*ngisabinca* (I am a traditional Zulu), for the traditional Zulu dance (Phuzekhemisi).

**Nomkhosi:** So you know how to do it as well.

**Sizeni:** I know very well how to do beadwork. I never used to buy beadwork when I was a young girl. I did it myself. I would see different designs people were wearing and I would go home and copy them. When there is an occasion, you would see me wearing beads, especially when we are going to a traditional Zulu dance [*sina ingoma*]. I can even make the skirt with pleats. There is one here in this locked drawer. I do everything. There is nothing that I do not do.

**Nomkhosi:** When do you sew?

**Sizeni:** The small machine is here underneath here.

**Nomkhosi:** There is a machine here?

**Sizeni:** Yes. I take it out and put it on top of the bed and start my sewing. The overlocking machine is with my boyfriend in Phoenix.

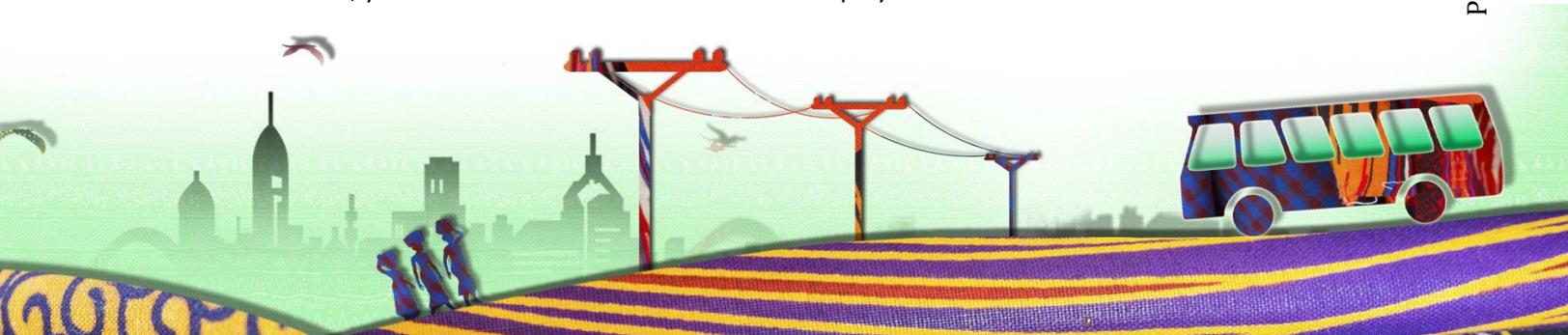
**Nomkhosi:** He lives in Phoenix?

**Sizeni:** Yes, he lives in Mount Moriya at Phoenix.

**Nomkhosi:** I thought you said he lives around here?

**Sizeni:** No, he also sells stuff here in town.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, you are all in business. You are all self-employed?





**Sizeni:** Yes. He fixes shoes.

**Nomkhosi:** So you are all in business?

**Sizeni:** Yes, there is nobody who is sitting down and doing nothing. My granddaughter right now is visiting. She came to Thokoza on Monday but today we left her at our house in Mount Moriya.

**Nomkhosi:** How old is she again?

**Sizeni:** She is 14 years old. She is grown-up lady.

**Nomkhosi:** Is she safe, all alone?

**Sizeni:** She stays by herself during the day. When she is tired of watching TV and listening to the radio, she closes the door, locks it and sleeps. She is not used to going around visiting.

**Nomkhosi:** How does she refer to you? Mom or granny?

**Sizeni:** She calls me *khulu*. This is according to our Zulu where I come from. She doesn't use these things people in Durban use. Her gogo would be my mother and I, the mother of her father, am her *khulu*. Here in Durban people get that wrong and they mix it up. It would be wrong if she called me gogo. In proper isiZulu I am her *khulu* and her granny is my mother.

**Nomkhosi:** You go to Shembe church as well?

**Sizeni:** No.

**Nomkhosi:** Does your boyfriend have a wife?

**Sizeni:** No.

**Nomkhosi:** So why don't you move in together and get married?

**Sizeni:** There is no money.

**Nomkhosi:** Is he even saving up for it?

**Sizeni:** Yes, he is trying. He would also like us to get married, but on the other hand, it has been a long time.

**Nomkhosi:** Would you like to get married to him?

**Sizeni:** Yes, I would like to get married if he can have money to pay *lobola*.

**Nomkhosi:** Who would he pay *lobola* to?

**Sizeni:** He would *lobola* to the remaining family members. Although I no longer have my biological parents I still have a few other family members. He can pay *lobola* and that money can be saved for me to buy the stuff that I would need when I have to get married.

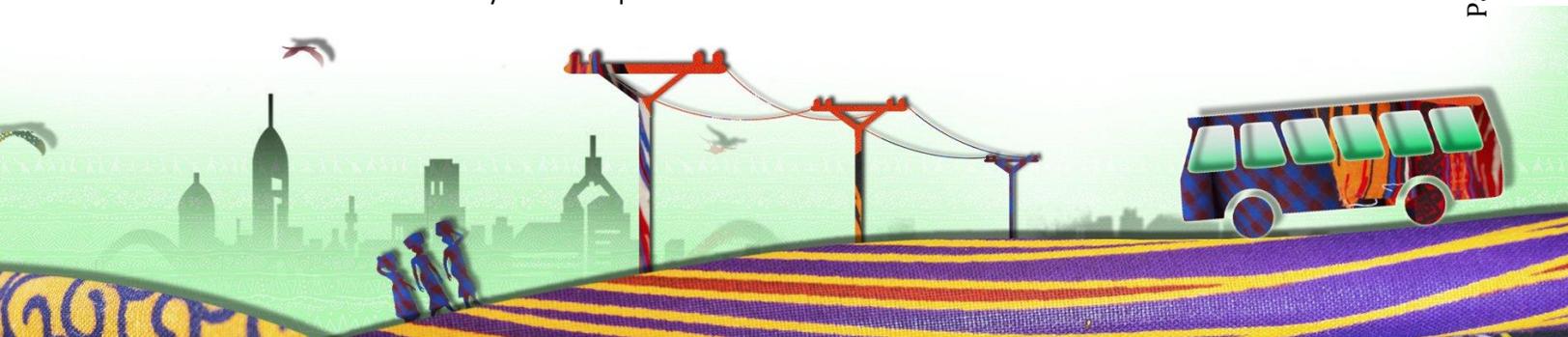
**Nomkhosi:** You would not have a problem of leaving your son behind.

**Sizeni:** I would not have a problem. As it is I do not live with him. He stays at home and there is no difference. I actually found him an older guy for him to live with. This guy also has had life troubles. I wanted my son to be able to visit the city and leave someone behind who would be able to clean the yard and keep the place safe from criminals.

**Nomkhosi:** Can you say that Thokoza is like your home now since you have been here so long and you know everything about it?

**Sizeni:** Yes, it seems as if it is home. I know the rules of this place even though they are not implemented anymore. It was so strict when we came. Now people do not observe the rules. When I came there was a rule that if you woke up at 4am to go selling on the streets you were not allowed to switch on the lights to wake others. I would sneak out to the bathroom and come back quietly so as not to disturb them. But rules are not followed now. People make a noise when they get up early. Even today, this mommy will tell you, she did not hear me when I came back early in the morning from Mount Moriya because I was very careful not to make any noise.

**Nomkhosi:** What time did you wake up?





**Sizeni:** When I am at Mount Moriya I wake up at 3am and take a taxi at 4am to get here by 4.30am or 4.40am.

**Nomkhosi:** You slept at Mount Moriya at 3am today?

**Sizeni:** Yes, as you can see I am not sleeping and I will not sleep until 9pm.

**Nomkhosi:** So where did you go when you arrived here at 4.30?

**Sizeni:** I went to sell.

**Nomkhosi:** Where?

**Sizeni:** At Juliana.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is Juliana?

**Sizeni:** On Dumpi Street, around the corner. It's in the corner.

**Nomkhosi:** Do you have a table there?

**Sizeni:** I have a square, which is registered with a number from the municipality.

**Nomkhosi:** How much do you pay in rent for that?

**Sizeni:** R530 per year. I go there to sell shorts, t-shirts and tracksuits mainly. Normally I take the pillows to my boyfriend's stand.

**Nomkhosi:** The time that you wake is too early!

**Sizeni:** I use my cell phone to wake me. I don't even eat before I go. I only eat when I come back.

**Nomkhosi:** What time do you come back?

**Sizeni:** We come back very early, sometimes at 8am or 7am.

**Nomkhosi:** Would you have made any sales by that time?

**Sizeni:** Yes, people would already have bought some things.

**Nomkhosi:** How much do you make for one morning?

**Sizeni:** It depends on how much you sell, but the problem is now there are too many people selling so there is no demand.

**Nomkhosi:** If it's not busy, how much could you make?

**Sizeni:** You can make R100 or R200, sometimes R300.

**Nomkhosi:** And then you come back around 8am and do what?

**Sizeni:** I would come back and start sewing the pillows, and then I would take it across the road for my boyfriend to sell. I generally spend the whole day up and down.

**Nomkhosi:** This morning, as you just left and came back, where did you go?

**Sizeni:** I went to the table outside, where I leave the pillows. My boyfriend stays there as he is fixing shoes.

**Nomkhosi:** So people buy from him?

**Sizeni:** Yes, and I go out and get my money from him.

**Nomkhosi:** And your other table?

**Sizeni:** I will see to that one tomorrow morning. We leave early and there is nobody selling there.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: Even the shops around that area are closed now.]

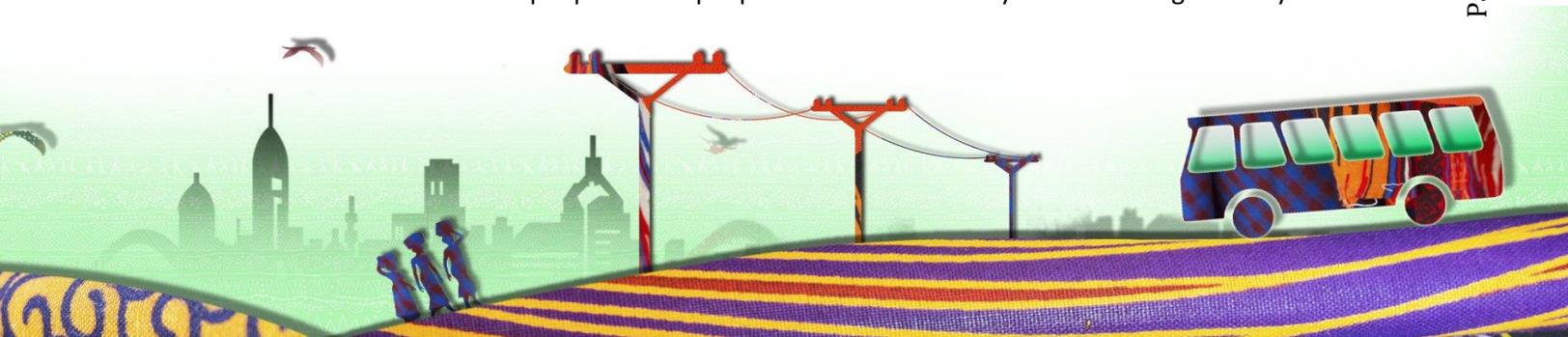
**Sizeni:** By 9am that place is empty. The people who come to buy at that space sleep at Mansel. They come and buy from us and go on collecting and buying different items. The woman we call *abakhosi*. They come in buses from Transkei.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, these are the people who buy in bulk?

**Sizeni:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** So that is your target [market]?

**Sizeni:** Yes. Like today, the ones who bought from us will go back to where they sell. In the evening loads of busses will come in with people. Those people will come to us early in the morning and maybe leave





again in the evening. So that's how we always have customers every morning. These people order many items and go back to where they come from to sell. For example, I sell pillows for R30 and she may sell it for R 100. They order from us and still make more money from their people. They get more profit because they also have to pay for transport.

**Nomkhosi:** This is the right kind of business. So you don't have any table around the hostel?

**Sizeni:** No, I don't have it, my dear.

**Nomkhosi:** I thought you were somewhere around here when you left.

**Sizeni:** No, I actually left and crossed the road.

**Nomkhosi:** So that is how life is?

**Sizeni:** Yes, and it goes well. When I started I only had one child. Now I even have a grandchild.

**Nomkhosi:** Who takes care of that child?

**Sizeni:** Her father. But if I also see something nice for her, I get it for her if I have the budget. I buy her shoes. I buy her socks. I buy her underwear—even her father does.

**Nomkhosi:** You guys get along?

**Sizeni:** Too much. She comes to visit here and she sleeps over sometimes.

**Nomkhosi:** Does she like to visit in this place?

**Sizeni:** Yes, she does. I am the one who does not like her to come here.

**Nomkhosi:** Why?

**Sizeni:** There is no respect anymore in this place. For example, let's say your child and my child are fighting outside. That child's parent will come in and start fighting with me although I was not there where the kids were playing and end up fighting.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, is that what happens here?

**Sizeni:** These mommies that I live with know that I am not somebody who likes to talk. How can I even control my granddaughter when she is here? Although I know that she is not wild, it can happen that she gets into a fight and that she will come back to me and I would not have anything to do with that. As I am saying that there is no respect anymore here.

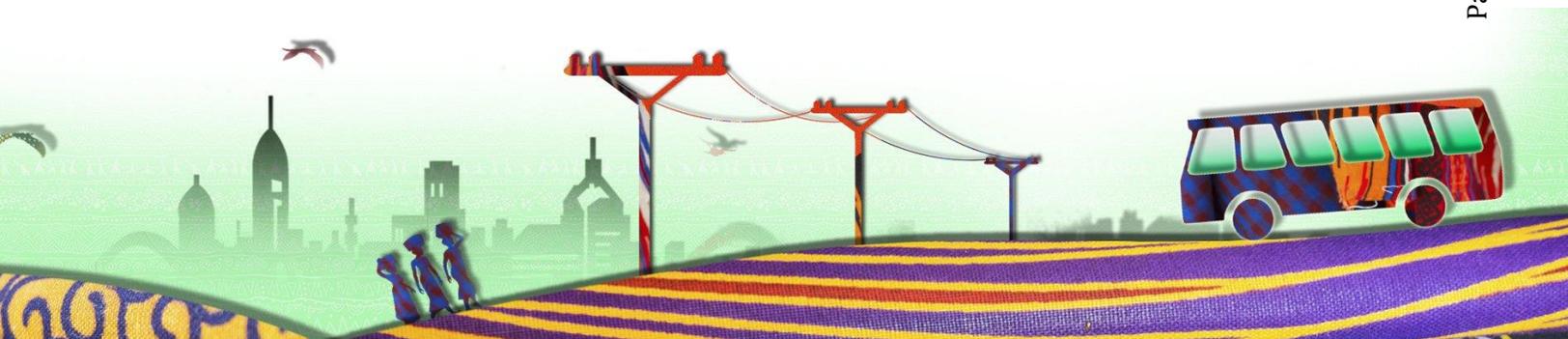
The kitchen used to be locked at 10pm. After that you could not cook in the kitchen. But now that does not happen anymore. No, it happens that people are passing by, singing loud, as drunk as they are, and there would be nothing you can do about that. Those things never used to happen. People used to have respect at Thokoza. If one did not follow the rules, she could [be turned out]. I am talking about us who came while rules were in place. Not now when drunkards disturb our peace by making a noise singing in the night so that we cannot fall asleep.

**Nomkhosi:** Those are women?

**Sizeni:** Yes, women drunkards. If I have to get up early while these mommies are sleeping, I put my clothes out ready for the morning first. If it is dark, I may not even determine the front or back of the dress. I have to go out into the passage where the lights are never put out, so that I can dress there.

I wish my keys were here. I have a big bunch of keys, but you will never hear me making a noise opening or closing door or the locker. I have to act like I am a person who is coming to steal something. Even when I come back with the dishes from the kitchen, I can be making noises like *hhkirikiqihhakorokoqo*. Maybe she didn't sleep at night and is only now sleeping and I come in with the noise of my dishes. That is not allowed. She is not supposed to be disturbed by me and my activities. I have to do everything peacefully and they have to be sleeping quietly.

**Nomkhosi:** Can you say that life is nice here?





**Sizeni:** Life is nice here because we are here and we are working. However, I cannot guarantee that I will be here till my old age. I am only renting here. I can go anytime I want to go. Even if I feel like going and not coming back, that's what I will do. I will just pack my bags and go. I do not even have that many clothes. I would go home. Remember, I do have home. My parents left me a home. But, as I said, I did not get married and I never changed my surname. I am still using my parents' surname.

**Nomkhosi:** How many siblings do you have?

**Sizeni:** There are three of us but my mother had twelve children.

**Nomkhosi:** Only three people remains? And the others?

**Sizeni:** The others passed on.

**Nomkhosi:** So many! What number were you?

**Sizeni:** I don't even know what number I was. Many of my siblings died young but there are many who came after me.

**Nomkhosi:** Where are the ones who are alive?

**Sizeni:** My big sister married into the Sabela family and the one younger married into Mbhele family, and I got left in the middle. We did not get the same luck.

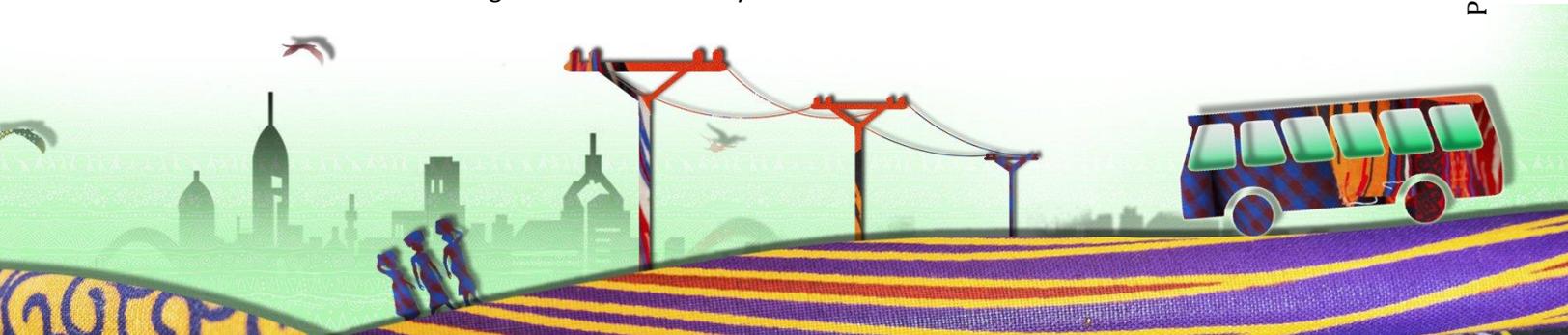
**Nomkhosi:** What challenges have every encountered as a woman?

**Sizeni:** It was the problem I had of the man who gave me a baby and then rejected me. This was somebody from my rural home. He came to the city and found a girlfriend that he lived with at KwaMashu J section in a two-room house. So as he lived with her, she was able to feed him anything that she wanted to *muthi* (traditional medicine) while I was there in the background at home. So perhaps it was through that *muthi* that he eventually married her. She was from Pietermaritzburg. I was the one who was with this man first but he ended up leaving me. That's how I got left behind. Their first child is also the same age as my son. This means that when I was pregnant with my boy, the other lady was pregnant with a girl. So I guess the girl worked hard so she did not lose him because I was a rural girl and she was from Pietermaritzburg. He eventually got married to her. Her surname was Ndlela and our children are the same age. They always play over that.

**Nomkhosi:** Do they have a relationship with each other?

**Sizeni:** Yes, they always WhatsApp each other. The other day, the boyfriend of that girl, gave my son some cash and said that he had to withdraw it from Shoprite. They also visit each other. I also know the mother of this daughter very well, (*umnakwethu uMaNdlela*). She was too jealous (*isikhwele*) when the man was still alive but now the man is dead. It's a pity that she never had a boy. She had two girls and the third-born boy passed away. My boy visits them and he is very [tidy]. The mommies in this room know him very well. He would clean the whole house, even if it is raining or thundering. MaNdlela likes him because when he visits he cleans for them. She would say that if I lived with this boy, my house would always be clean. She likes him now because his father is dead. She did not like him when he was alive because he thought he was going to claim his inheritance. Now there is nothing to be scared of. When we were visiting Adams my boy got sick after being robbed with a knife. In the incident he lost his finger while trying to fight back. He is a boy from the rural areas and people wanted to rob him. He went to the hospital at Mshiyeni. MaNdlela visited him at the hospital. She lives in Avoca, which is not far from where I live at Moriya. She called me and asked me which ward he was in. The children have a good relationship. They do not have a problem. Even MaNdlela wishes that she was living with my boy. But when his father's retirement money was paid out, she did not even give him a cent.

**Nomkhosi:** There is nothing that came to the boy?





**Sizeni:** Nothing at all.

**Nomkhosi:** Where did [the father of your child] work?

**Sizeni:** I don't know. The last time I checked he was working somewhere behind the chest clinic. But I later heard that he was no longer there. But anyway, when he died, she was supposed to give my son some money but because she is a girl from the city, she did not do that.

**Nomkhosi:** I am sure even girls from rural areas would do that.

**Sizeni:** Well, I don't know. Maybe she spoke to the lawyers. Maybe there was money allocated to my son but she spoke to them and she took it all. At that time, she still had hatred in her heart. It is only now that she loves him.

**Nomkhosi:** When did he die?

**Sizeni:** Not too long ago. My granddaughter was already here. How old was she? She could have been two or three years old.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, that's a while back.

**Sizeni:** Even my granddaughter goes to MaNdlela. She likes the children. She does not have a problem because the bone that she was fighting for is no longer there. She knows that she and I are now alike. That means she thought that when her man was still alive, his son would take all the inheritance because he is a boy. But when the man passed away, she realised that there was no reason for her to continue hating him.

**Nomkhosi:** It is always good when children get along.

**Sizeni:** They really do get along. There is nothing that they do without letting their big brother know. They would say: "Brother, we are about to do this. Can you please come?" And he would go to them.

**Nomkhosi:** Do you have people living here at Thokoza who come from the same area as you?

**Sizeni:** I have a sister here who lives in room 79. She is from a family with a same surname. She is older and came here before me. Her mother was MaMajoka and mine was MaZondo.

**Nomkhosi:** She came before you?

**Sizeni:** Yes, and she is older than me. She is at work right now. They call her Soka, a shortening of our surname.

**Nomkhosi:** What do they call you here?

**Sizeni:** The mummies in this room also call me Soka, although some people call me Masoka.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, I see. So you said you are happy with your home. You can go home at any time. You are not married but can get married anytime. You are self-employed.

**Sizeni:** Yes, it's like that. I am ready to do anything and take on anything. I don't have any problems.

**Nomkhosi:** How old were you when your parents died?

**Sizeni:** How old was I when my mother passed away? Eh ... I don't know but right now I am 56 years old.

**Nomkhosi:** 56?

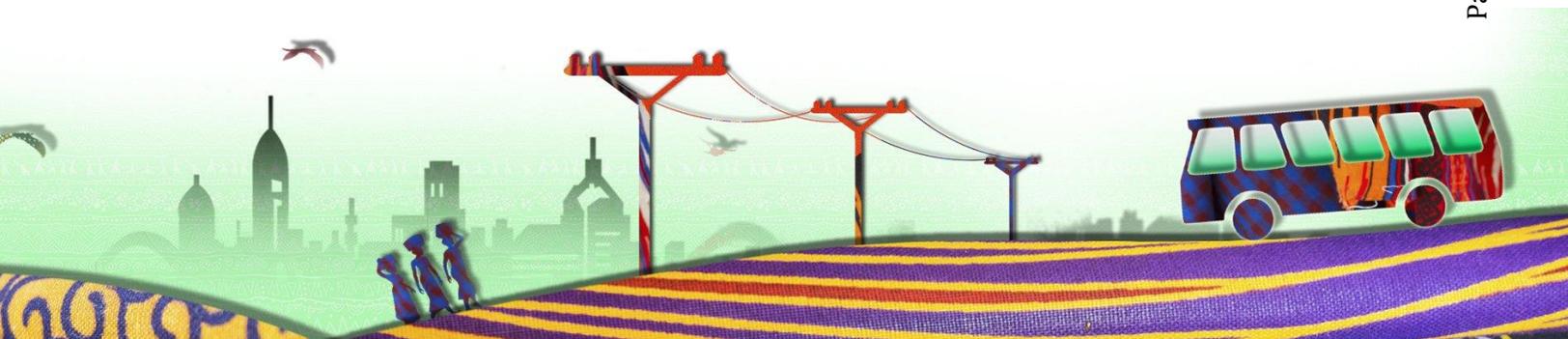
**Sizeni:** Yes, I was born in 1961.

**Nomkhosi:** You are well kept, my dear. You wouldn't say that you are 56 years old.

**Sizeni:** March 25.

**Nomkhosi:** So who did your parents leave you with?

**Sizeni:** Well, they left me in this city. I was already working. I used to go back and visit. I cried for the bones of my mother and my father, but I was able to take care of myself and I did not have any stress. The tears that I shed were because my parents were leaving me, not that I was worried about what I would do. Actually at that time we were really making a lot of money. I started selling here in 1986. I got here





in 1983 and in 1986 I started selling in the city. Those were the days when there was a whole lot of money outside there. [*yayisakhiwa ngamafosholo*]

**Nomkhosi:** *Hawu!* Really?

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: There were not so many people who were selling at that time.]

**Sizeni:** There were not too many people who were selling. Now there are too many of us and there is no business. We even have people from Zimbabwe who have come to sell here. There are people who do not even have permits.

Personally when I started I was told that if I wanted to sell, I first needed a piece of paper from the municipality which permitted me to sell. I knew the experience of Boers walking on your stuff [products], breaking and destroying it. I used to see cigarettes [boxes] on the road at the market on Warwick Avenue. They would [be tossed] on the floor [from the selling table] and a van would run them over. A few could be saved from the box. You would pick it up. But some were destroyed and there was nothing else you could do. Your money was already gone.

**Nomkhosi:** That means the apartheid period did not treat you too well?

**Sizeni:** Oh, I knew it very well. My boyfriend at that time had a shop at Ntuzuma. We still had the ZP (KwaZulu Police) at that time. I remember them well—coming into the house shooting and killing people in front of us. That was when there were nasty political fights between ANC and IFP. And I well remember teargas and how it came into your throat.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: It was very painful.]

**Sizeni:** Once it was thrown right in front of me. When I was growing up I had asthma. The teargas affected me so badly. I ran around and just got into somebody's house and I couldn't breathe. When you inhale teargas, you just want to swallow water, no matter how dirty the water is.

I have experienced hardships here in the city. There was a time where it was announced on TV that all those people who experienced hardships [during apartheid] and had shops should come forward. They said this to people who were harmed during the times of [political] violence. But I did not go because the shop was not mine. If it was mine, I would have gone to sit down and explain to them what happened step by step.

**Nomkhosi:** How did that end up?

**Sizeni:** Well, the shop belonged to my boyfriend at that time. It was not mine. He is the one who was supposed to go. You cannot stand for something that is not yours, because you need to have the history. I know very well what apartheid did to us here in Durban—the Boers.

I would sometimes hear people saying anything they want. But I am the one who experienced it, even being self-employed as a hawker. If you are not working here and now, you don't have to because now we are free. It's just that there is not much money as it was in the past. But we did get a lot of money from what we were making in the past.

**Nomkhosi:** At Thokoza, are there women who are from outside South Africa?

**Sizeni:** *Amakwerekwere* (foreigners)? No, we don't have them here at Thokoza. They have not started coming in.

**Nomkhosi:** Not even one?

**Sizeni:** No, they have not started coming into our hostel. I know one lady who is a nurse. I normally see her when she goes to work. She is the only one that I know. I'm not sure who she started living with. I think she started by being an *imbamba* as well. But we don't have a lot of them coming here.

**Nomkhosi:** What do you think is the reason for that?

**Sizeni:** Ay, I don't know why.





[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: There has been a lot of discrimination in this place. You would never enter this place if you did not support the IFP. It was IFP vs ANC. After some time, the ANC started to dominate as well.]

**Sizeni:** Now there is everything in this place. There is Inkatha and ANC, and there is Magwaza [from the NFP] in this place. You can put on the regalia of any political party. Like me, I am ANC, but when I meet with IFP supporters, we greet each other and there is no problem. In the past we used to bash each other in the passages.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: Now you would see *ibutho* (army) coming in and chanting their songs but you can go in and do your thing. There is no problem.]

**Sizeni:** We have been here at Thokoza through difficult times. I was ANC when I came, but I had to join IFP and keep quiet about my ANC identity. When somebody came to ask me how I was doing, I would say nothing about my ANC but they would always know when they left. You could make me sign IFP membership and I could agree. I never wanted to be exposed as ANC. My vote has never gone anywhere except ANC. But when I came to Thokoza, I joined IFP. By the time they left I would say: "Weh!"

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: There is no one who did not become IFP.]

**Sizeni:** Where were you going to stay if you did not become Inkatha? Who was going to allow you in? We had to go to Ulundi and we had to pay for those going.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: We used to pay indeed.]

**Sizeni:** You would pay R75 but you wouldn't go to Ulundi. You would pay but not because you wanted to.

**Nomkhosi:** Was it not possible to do things in secret with neighbours who were ANC?

**Sizeni:** You would not survive in this place if you came out as ANC. There is only one lady in this place who came out as ANC. She also got a good hiding in order for us to also come out as ANC supporters.

**Nomkhosi:** What did she do?

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: She revealed herself.]

**Sizeni:** She had an ANC keyring. They saw it and beat her up. It was from then that people started coming out.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is she now?

**Sizeni:** She is still here and she is the history of ANC at the hostel. She is the first comrade of this place. Her name is Ayanda and she is married now.

**Nomkhosi:** She is married and she still lives here?

**Sizeni:** Yes, she lives here. She does visit her husband, but I often see her visiting here. In this place most people who get married do not leave this place. They come visiting but do not let go of the room. Getting married does not mean they have to let go of their rooms.

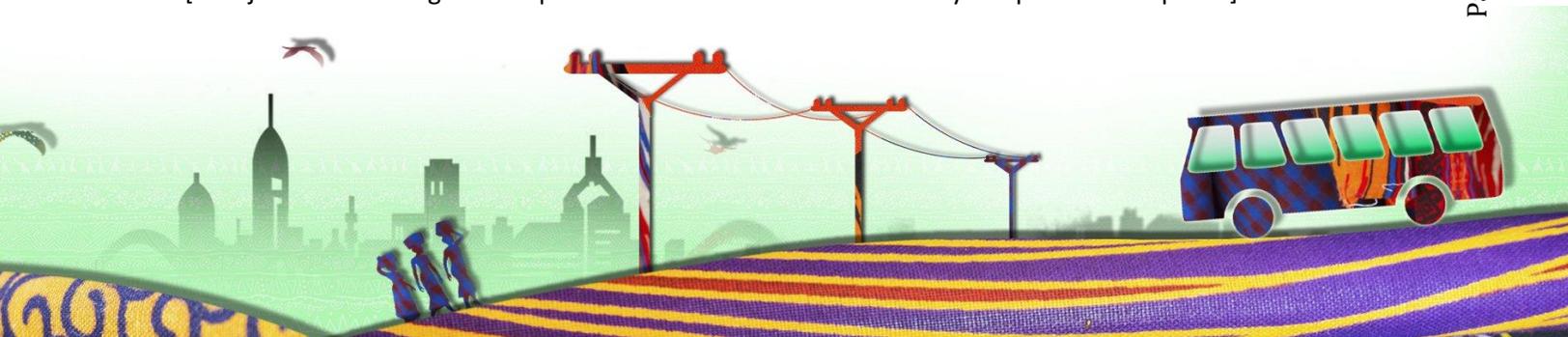
**Nomkhosi:** But that means that person is not full-time with her husband?

**Sizeni:** She comes and goes. Maybe she spends one night here and goes back. But now we are free. We can wear our own party regalia. We even hug each other and there is no problem. We used to be like cats and rats. Every time we saw each other we would beat each other.

**Nomkhosi:** Would you say that it was better while IFP ruled because the hostel had more order?

**Sizeni:** It's not the ANC which caused all this. It is the lack of respect from the young people. As you know, as people retire much younger people come into this space. When I leave this place, I will leave my granddaughter in my place. When she lives here by herself, she would not have the respect. She would also not know all the rules of the past.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: She would also be influenced by her peers in this place.]





**Sizeni:** Yes, they would influence each other negatively. Even when older women tell them those rules, they do not listen because it is something that they do not relate to. This place is like a hospital. Even when I would be sleeping at the mortuary someone would replace me and take over my bed. You know what I mean. The girl would come here and find other rules, and these are not the ones which I had found when I came.

**Nomkhosi:** This means that the older women who bring young women do not make clear all the rules of this place.

**Sizeni:** When you bring a small child into this place, where exactly would you stay with that child because we are such in a tight space? When you look at this room closely, you will see there is room for one person only.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: Even that person alone would not have enough space.]

**Sizeni:** Yes, but it is better because she has her bed, her locker and her stove because now we cook in our bedrooms. The municipality broke apart the stoves from the kitchen. So you could say it is better if this room belongs to one person only. As it is, if that mommy wants to pass, she can't. She would have to move things first to get through. Anybody sitting there would have to move first so that you can pass. Well, we can say it's good to be here because we are able to wake up and go to work for our kids and they get something to eat. But it is not proper. We should not be living like this. Anybody who is sick and coughing [exposes you to infection].

**Nomkhosi:** How do you deal with the issue of cleanliness? I know that some people are very clean and others don't really care.

**Sizeni:** We have to persevere with all. You can't say much about it because this is not your house. You can live with a really untidy person but the untidiness would be in her corner and you would keep your corner clean. There is nothing that you can do because we are mixed. They never decided that older people should stay on their own on one side. But even the young people [offend] the old people when they are mixed. These mommies said they were happy to get me to live with them because I am mature, although I am not exactly their age. But I am way better than young people. Young people do not respect older people. They tell them straight to the face: "Hey, you old lady, you are not going to tell me anything. Why are you even still here at the hostel?" These young people really do as they please. They don't care about respect. Even if the older women in the room do not like the noise, they would [turn up the volume] because they don't care. You can't tell them anything because this is not your house.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: At ten o'clock you find that this is when the noise really takes off.]

**Sizeni:** You find that when another woman says she is not well and wants to sleep, if you want to put on loud music, you just do it. You [are entitled to do it] because of the rent money you play. I used to live in Room 79 but my bed was taken away when I was away for a while.

**Nomkhosi:** How come? Is this when you don't pay rent?

**Sizeni:** Even if you do pay, if you disappear, they say *akulali imali embhedeni* (the money is not sleeping on the bed). They take it away even if you pay your rent. So that's how I lost my bed at room 79.

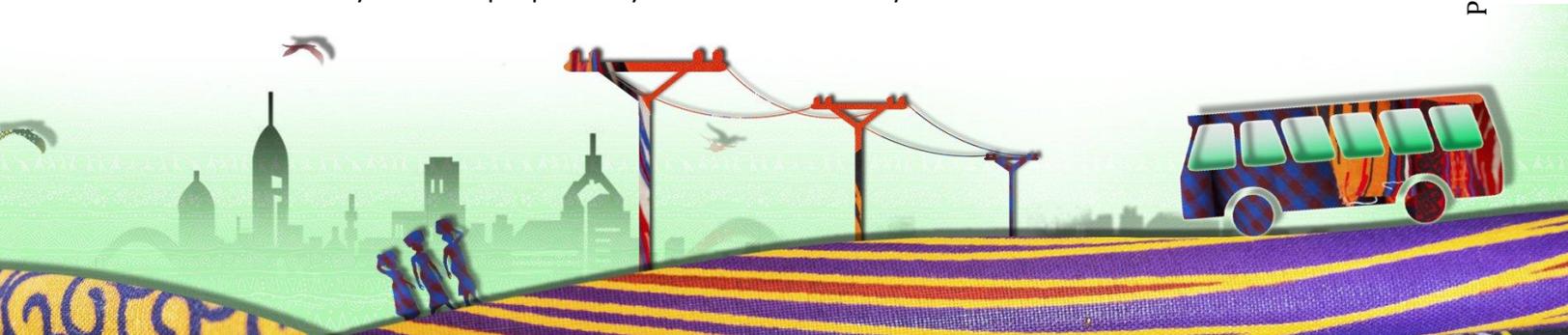
**Nomkhosi:** How long were you gone?

**Sizeni:** It was not really a long time. It was just when I was up and down, in and out.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: Who takes away the house of a white man when he goes abroad for five years?]

**Sizeni:** Imagine, I come in here each day to get my stuff and go sell. I also come to the toilet.

**Nomkhosi:** Maybe it's the people who you live with who sold you out?





**Sizeni:** Obviously. People do that in this place. But even here, because of the mummies I live with, I can go for two weeks and they do not sell me out. But when I am around Durban, I come in every day. I have never been absent for three months.

**Nomkhosi:** So how did you get a room again?

**Sizeni:** I went to Martin West. Remember, I am smart. I belong to the ANC. I got there and told them that I am present in my room. And they also saw my bill and I asked what the problem was.

**Nomkhosi:** So how did you get a room again?

**Sizeni:** They gave me their number which I had to give to Nsumpa (the hostel supervisor). He called them and they told him to look for a room for me. There was already another person who had taken possession of my bed. So I got this room after the woman who used to be here left.

**Nomkhosi:** Where did this one who used to live here go?

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: She went back home.]

**Sizeni:** She went to look after her kids at home.

**Nomkhosi:** Did she say goodbye?

**Sizeni:** Yes. She went and cancelled her membership at the hostel.

**Nomkhosi:** I am sure that is not normal.

**Sizeni:** No, it happens.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: We will all do it like that when the time comes.]

**Sizeni:** As I was telling you I will not wait until I am an old grandmother. When I feel it is time, I will go.

**Nomkhosi:** So it is not like people want to save this space for their girl children?

**Sizeni:** Some do save spaces for their daughters.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: I am also just waiting to finish my house and then I will go.]

**Sizeni:** You just need to take your ID and go to the office to say you are going. Anyway you came here to [work to] raise your children. Now that they have grown, you have to go. You don't have to wait until you are too old. Why should the home in the rural areas be empty when you are here? As I am saying, I am also really just trying to finish some small things, but you will see me going.

**Nomkhosi:** Will you go back to the rural areas?

**Sizeni:** Yes, I will go back. Anyway I am from the mission area and we have electricity, water and everything. I also work the land at home.

**Nomkhosi:** Really?

**Sizeni:** What do you think? I sell *madumbis* (type of tubular vegetable) to the people of Thokoza and I also sell *imifino* (green leafy vegetables) to these people.

**Nomkhosi:** This is when you come back from home.

**Sizeni:** Even when I am coming back from Phoenix, I sell it here at Thokoza.

**Nomkhosi:** There is land available?

**Sizeni:** Even yesterday I was at the garden. I planted sweet potato, *madumbis*, spinach, mealie meal and I come back to sell it here at Thokoza. I do everything. My father used to say if I had got an education, I would have gone far.

If I sell *imifino* for R5 a packet, maybe I can make R35. These people here do not have land to plant; they can't do it on concrete. There are those who never go back anymore, some don't even have homes anymore. They would buy it.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: I do talk to them. It's not because they do not have homes. They have homes. They have children as well. They have been abused by their own kids. When they come back with pension, their kids would pull out a knife and demand the money.]





**Nomkhosi:** A knife for your parent!

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: Your child can even kill you. They run away because of their kids. God gave me luck. My child asks. When I want to I give him, but if I don't want to, I don't.]

**Sizeni:** Just like my own child: he will never force me to buy for his daughter. When he needs he asks. Actually my son does not ask. He just keeps quiet. Because I am smart, I am able to see if granddaughter needs something and I buy it for her. If I buy something for her, my son is very grateful because he knows that it is not my responsibility. It is his responsibility. I brought him into this world and I took care of him. He must also take care of his daughter. But when I buy something for his daughter, he kneels down and says thank you. When someone pays him for something they have bought at home, he calls me and asks why he should do with the money. I say that he should use the money to buy whatever they need. As it is, my granddaughter has clothes that are too small for her. They called me to ask if I thought she should take them to her half-sisters. I said okay: they can go and give them. He never does anything without checking with me. He was raised very well.

**Nomkhosi:** He is really disciplined.

**Sizeni:** Yebo.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: If your child respects you, it's because of your God.]

**Sizeni:** My children respect me very much. If I fight with him when he is drunk, he would go sleep it off. I still beat him as my child, although he is 34 years old.

**Nomkhosi:** 34 is too old.

**Sizeni:** The following day he would come back to me and apologise for whatever he did wrong. But some children do not do that.

**Nomkhosi:** That means you are strong, raising a son like that.

**Sizeni:** I was helped by my parents. My father gave serious beatings; my mother did not. My child is also diligent and he works the land. He does everything that a girl does—he cooks as well. He does not eat and leave his plate there. When I go home, I can just sit and watch TV. He would clean, collect water and do everything. Now he gets help from my granddaughter. I just sit down and watch my TV and DVD. I enjoy traditional music. As I change the channels, I am served with food and water and tea. Sometimes I get served as I am lying in bed. There is no man in that house. My man is here in Durban. They would bring be a basin with water to wash my hands. While I am still sleeping, he would already be preparing food.

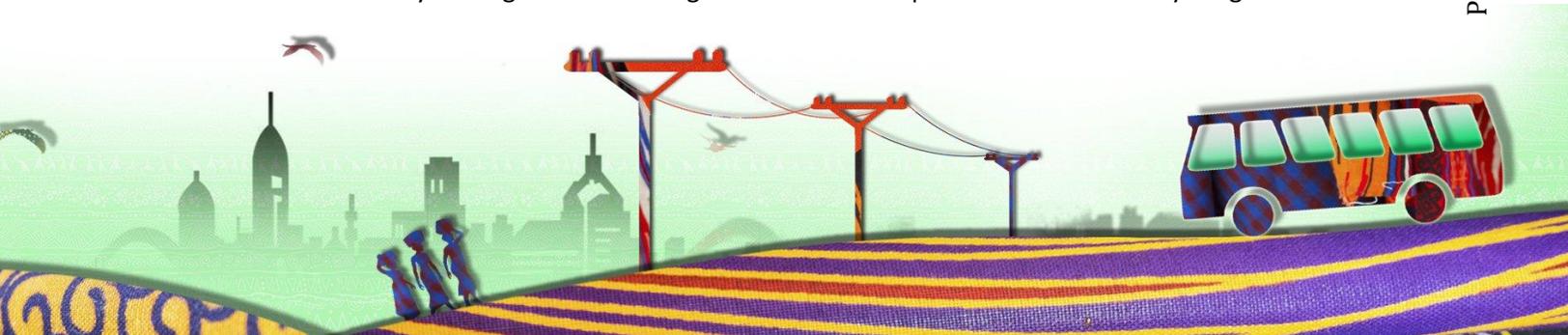
**Nomkhosi:** Now it seems you are going to have a problem getting daughter-in-law.

**Sizeni:** It's okay, I can get a lazy daughter but it's not likely that I will get one at all. I have given up waiting.

**Nomkhosi:** Why?

**Sizeni:** My son is too strict. He wants things done his way. He has had many women and they leave him because of his cleanliness. He does not mind cleaning the house even when it's raining and we don't have concrete in the yard, which means the house will be dirty anyway. If they don't do it, he does it himself. Can you afford to live with somebody like that? His bedroom has a carpet on the floor. Sometimes he puts perfume on it and the whole house smells of the perfume. He says he is trying to prevent the carpet from smelling because we don't have bathroom. We bath in our bedrooms and water gets spilled. You will never find any kind of funny smell in my house.

There are many women that he found after he broke up with the mother of his daughter, but he is too clean. When he asks you to do washing for him and you take time, he does it himself. He won't wait for that. Can you afford to live with somebody like that? Have you ever been made to scrub the floors when it is already raining? I am surviving because I am his parent. I do not do anything that I don't





want to do. I am able to say no. But if it is a girlfriend, you can't tell him off, because he will hit you. If I say I won't do something, I don't, and he will never say anything to me. He would do the cleaning himself. But if it was a girlfriend and she says no, he would hit her. She would be the same as his daughter.

[Interjection from Gogo MaHlophe: You must get him those rubber mats used in cars so he can put them down at the entrance.]

**Sizeni:** It's just that we still have mats at home. We have tiles and there are shoes for outside and shoes for inside.

The other day he was stressing about why I did not come back. When I came back I brought with me a room-divider costing R1000. He surprised me. He had painted the whole house and put down a new mat. He is forever moving furniture around. TV and home theatre are never positioned in the same place. He changes them around all the time, all on his own. This year he bought R700 three-piece cabinet. It is white and you need Handy Andy to clean it.

**Nomkhosi:** You will cry when he gets married.

**Sizeni:** I would not. I really wish that he would get married. But I don't think it's possible. I have seen the different people he has been with since he broke up with his daughter's mom. I think he was also really hurt by that experience. Those people looked down upon him. And I know that even that girl would not have left him if she knew that things would turn out like this. Even her sisters come round sometimes. Our home was very poor but now it has totally turned around.

**Nomkhosi:** God has good plans for all of us, but the timing is different for each person.

