



Interview with: Khanyisa (24)
Interviewed by: Nomkhosi
Date of interview: 10 October 2016
Travel: Hammersdale – Folweni - Ndwedwe - Folweni - Durban

Nomkhosi: Can I ask you if I may also talk to her about her life?

Thenjiwe: Must she stop cutting the cabbage and talk to you?

Nomkhosi: No, she can chop with her hands and speak with her mouth. Please ask for me.

Thenjiwe: Wait I am still collecting the guards. So what did you say your name was?

Nomkhosi: I am Nomkhosi. I work at DUT. I am from Newtown A.

Thenjiwe: Khanyisa, this is Nomkhosi from uLundi.

Nomkhosi: No, Nongoma. I am from Mtubatuba, married to a family from Nongoma.

Thenjiwe: Okay. She works here at UDT.

Khanyisa: What?

Thenjiwe: She works at UDT.

Nomkhosi: DUT.

Khanyisa: It's DUT.

Thenjiwe: She works there. She likes laughing at me.

Nomkhosi: (Laughs).

Thenjiwe: This thing is married.

Nomkhosi: (Laughs at being called 'this thing').

Khanyisa: I can also see that.

Thenjiwe: She is married.

Nomkhosi: The December 2011 that you were talking about is the year I got married.

Thenjiwe: The day I [had a] stroke. So I don't know, Khanyisa. She says she would like to know some stuff but I am tired of talking to her. I have been talking for a very long time.

Khanyisa: But I am at work.

Thenjiwe: That is no problem. She will sit here. She will put her chair here and you will continue working. I have been telling her, Khanyisa, that you are struggling (We all laugh).

Khanyisa: This microphone in front of you is recording you.

Thenjiwe: Eh ... I don't care because I am not speaking *ihlazo* (shameful). I am supporting the women with kids [and I know] that they live under tight circumstances.

Nomkhosi: Can I come close to you, Mam'Khanyisa?

Khanyisa: Yes, you can come close.

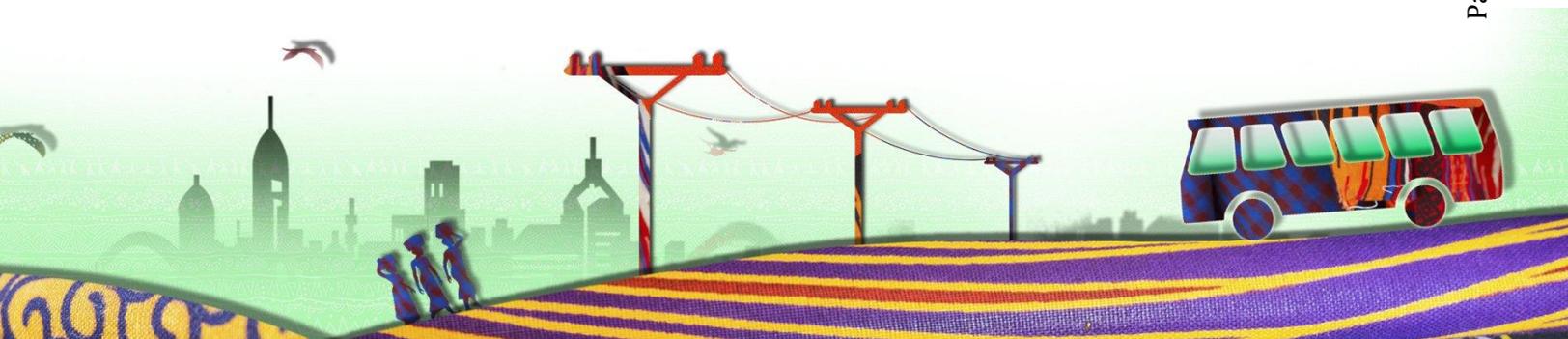
Thenjiwe: Hey, Nomkhosi, do you know that I have washing to do and I said I am waiting for Khanyisa?

Nomkhosi: Oh, you were waiting for her to help you?

Thenjiwe: Yes. She was supposed to go dry the clothes for me.

Nomkhosi: But she has already started working.

Thenjiwe: That doesn't matter. She can stop what she is doing and help me and then come back. I would look after her stuff. I know how much she sells oranges, potatoes and everything. Do you have sweets, Khanyisa? Please give me anything to give to this girl so that she can chew on something because since she came she has not eaten anything.





Khanyisa: (Hands over the sweets to me and I say thank you). She says I have not said thank you by paying. (Thenjiwe jumps in saying she will pay and I say thank you again).

Thenjiwe: Khanyisa says I have not said thank you and I say thank you again.

Khanyisa: No.

I say thank you, she says no. (I ask what I am supposed to say). Thenjiwe replies: "God bless you." (I also then say: "God bless you" and Khanyisa says: "Amen".)

Nomkhosi: (We laugh out loud. She says she is claiming her blessings through me. I start introducing myself and my work.) Can I get permission to record our interview? This is important so that I do not forget what we speak about.

Khanyisa: I am Khanyisa, I am from Folweni.

Nomkhosi: How did you come to the hostel?

Khanyisa: I came here through work.

Nomkhosi: You came from some place not so far from here?

Khanyisa: No, I came here because I wanted a place to stay.

Nomkhosi: Where do you work, or where did you work?

Khanyisa: I am working not anymore. I came here in 1989.

Nomkhosi: You have been here for a long time.

Khanyisa: In those days I used to sell at the beachfront. As time went on I started getting casual jobs and I continued living here at Thokoza. Thokoza used to help people who were working, those who were looking for a job and those that had homes far from Durban. One would stay here as a way of being closer to work.

Nomkhosi: Do you have children?

Khanyisa: Yes, I do.

Nomkhosi: How many children do you have?

Khanyisa: I have three.

Nomkhosi: Where do they live?

Khanyisa: The oldest one is also here at Thokoza because of casual jobs. I don't know how old she is but she was born in 1986. The others remained at home. I am not married: the groom passed on.

Nomkhosi: How often do you go to Folweni?

Khanyisa: I go when I have to go.

Nomkhosi: Do you still have a home at Folweni?

Khanyisa: Yes, my sisters live there. We do not have parents anymore.

Nomkhosi: You said one of your children lives here because of casual jobs?

Khanyisa: Yes, I have one here because of employment.

Nomkhosi: Where does she work?

Khanyisa: I actually do not know, but it's just a job.

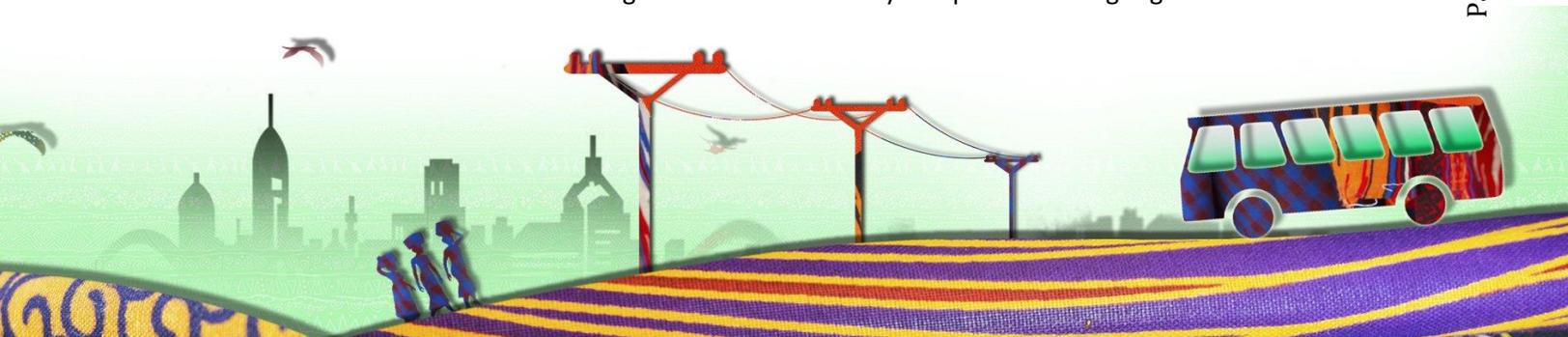
Thenjiwe: She has a casual job with the municipality.

Nomkhosi: Does she work here at the hostel?

Khanyisa: Not here inside the hostel but outside on the road.

Nomkhosi: And what do you do for a living? Are you a business person?

Khanyisa: With the shortage of casual jobs, I had to find something that I would do because the children at home need bread to eat and cannot go to bed on an empty stomach. I also could not expect to be helped by other people as I am old now. It would not make sense for the children to ask them and for me to also ask them. So I thought that I also had to try and put something together and see what





comes of it. I decided to buy cabbages, chop them and sell them so that I am able to send something back home so that they could continue going to the toilet. I would also continue working because that is the main reason why we all work (so we are able to go to the toilet).

(We all laugh).

Nomkhosi: So how did you get this spot where you are based? Did you get permission from the superintendent or what?

Khanyisa: Yes, I discussed this with the superintendent in order for me to be able to sell stuff here. I started by selling in the same spot where the lady on the other side is based. At that time, she went to give birth as she had been pregnant. We discussed it and agreed that I could sell there while she was away. When she came back from maternity, I still had stock to sell and I had to finish selling it. It was clear that we could not be both based in the same spot selling similar items. So I had to get a separate space and I spoke to the superintendent and he said he would look for a space for me. Now this space is just a temporary solution as he is still looking for a space for me. The reason why I have to sell here is we are all needy. We are struggling and things would really be difficult if I were to stop.

I have just bought a R20 card for prepaid electricity and I sent the numbers home because they called me to say they don't have electricity. I got this R20 from selling here. I let them continue with life at home.

Nomkhosi: How many of your children are left at home?

Khanyisa: Many of them. They are like a flock. They include the children of my late sisters and brothers. There are too many of them.

Nomkhosi: Are you the oldest in your family?

Khanyisa: Yes.

Nomkhosi: Do they work?

Khanyisa: One of them has epilepsy. She is not well and has many problems. And then there is the last-born. She is the one who takes care of all of those children who live there. When I get home I talk to her about problems and I advise her.

Nomkhosi: This means that you are the head of the household?

Khanyisa: You could say so.

Nomkhosi: Do your children visit you here?

Khanyisa: Yes, they do. Even the children of my late sisters come here. I allow them to come during school holidays for a short while and then they go.

Nomkhosi: Where do you live?

Khanyisa: In room 30, not far from here.

Nomkhosi: How many beds are in your room?

Khanyisa: I live in a 3-bed room. But when its school holidays, there are always a lot of people and they even sleep in the corridors.

Nomkhosi: But that is outside.

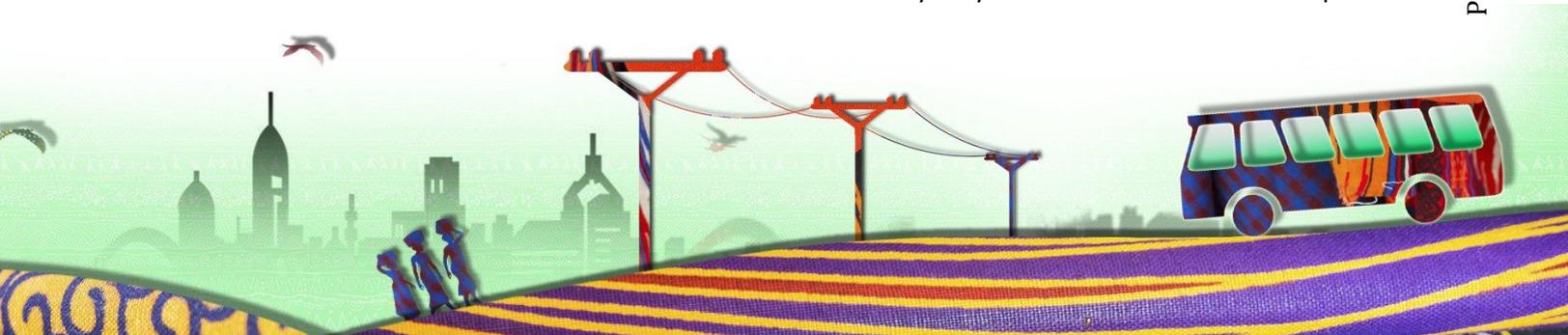
Khanyisa: Yes, they do sleep there. We also used to sleep here when we were lodgers.

Nomkhosi: Is it safe?

Khanyisa: It's safe because there are security [guards] and burglar guards. We would really have a problem if anything happened because it would be difficult for someone to pass by the security guards.

Nomkhosi: So people do sleep in the corridors?

Khanyisa: Yes, they do during the school holidays, because our rooms are very small. There are three of us in our bedroom. Each one of us has visitors and obviously they would not fit into our small space.





They sleep with heads and feet facing all sorts of directions because of a lack of space. There is nothing that we can do about this because we like our kids to visit us and they also like to leave homes and visit us here. [We cannot send them away because we do not have space for them to visit.]

Nomkhosi: Did you come here straight from Folweni?

Khanyisa: Eh ... no. I heard that there was a hostel here, a place where women get assistance when they want a job—that's how it was. I got in contact with other women. We came to this place while it was still difficult and the security was tight. We used to pay 50 cents through the windows.

Nomkhosi: Explain how that happened.

Khanyisa: We used to need 50 cents to come here.

Nomkhosi: Per night?

Khanyisa: Yes. They would determine how many days you could come for. Sometimes we would spend the night at the Durban station. This was when we could not come back here for a certain number of days. We would eventually come back and pay that 50 cents. There was another woman who used to live here, exactly where Thenjiwe lives now. She lived here because she used to work inside the hostel. It takes a very long time of being a lodger before you can get a space and pay rent.

Nomkhosi: 50 cents was paid by lodgers?

Khanyisa: Yes, that was the amount paid by lodgers.

Nomkhosi: Do you like living here?

Khanyisa: Ahhh! I cannot say that I would like to live here for the rest of my life. It's just that you do not know where you will go. It's not easy to get houses.

Nomkhosi: How about going home?

Khanyisa: It's a problem to go home. There comes a time when you know you are not supposed to be at home anymore. As I said, I have children who are quite grown up now. I have a boy who is about 25—he comes after the one who was born in 1986. I am not sure if the boy is 24 or 25. But there comes a time for you to go. You get stuck at home.

Nomkhosi: Can you say that living here actually helps you? Does it give you your own space, especially since you say your home is overcrowded?

Khanyisa: Being here is really about hustling. There is no other way.

Nomkhosi: So what makes you go home?

Khanyisa: Missing my kids.

Nomkhosi: But they do visit here?

Khanyisa: The boys are not allowed here. My boy is old enough. Long ago there used to be a law that once your son is over 12 years, he is not allowed to come inside the hostel. This is because we get naked here when we go to bath and come back to dress. So boys are not allowed here. They have to stop in the foyer.

Nomkhosi: How does your son feel about you living in a place where he is not allowed?

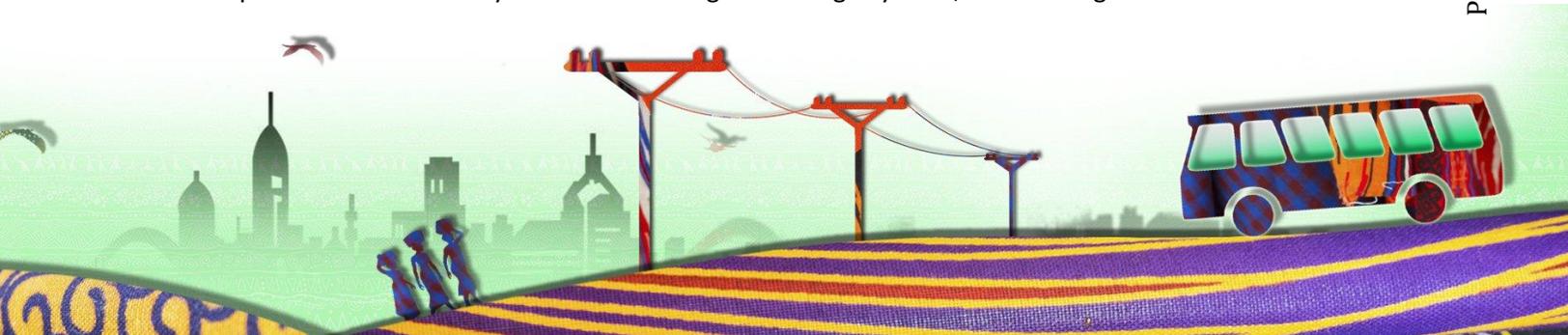
Khanyisa: He does not quite like it but there is nothing he can do about it because eventually they have to eat.

Nomkhosi: How old are you?

Khanyisa: I am quite old. If I am not mistaken, I am around 51. I am sure you will not dispute that.

Nomkhosi: I will believe what you say. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 to 10 years?

Khanyisa: There are old women here. But [I would like to leave before I get to that age.] You come to this place to hustle. When you are not working or hustling anymore, it is nice to go back home. But I know





it would be difficult to go back home when there is nobody who is working at home. I also am not in the best of health. I might have arthritis and I have sore feet, but there is nothing I can do because the kids are not working. You find that some would pass matric but you are short of money to allow them to study further.

Nomkhosi: You said you did not get married.

Khanyisa: Yes. A woman gets to know on her first day that if she has a man there is nothing she can do except to take her bag and go out with that man.

Nomkhosi: But that's not a normal life.

Khanyisa: Well, you have to get used to it.

Nomkhosi: Since we now live in democracy, don't you think that you guys are deprived of rights?

Khanyisa: As you discussed with Thenjiwe, maybe it would be better if it were men because they can fight. In our case, if men were allowed to come here, a man would come to see me but he may not deserve me, even though I do the best for him. We are very weak.

Nomkhosi: Then what would happen?

Khanyisa: Then I would take your man.

Nomkhosi: But outside these things happen anyway.

Khanyisa: Yes, but it happens more in here.

Nomkhosi: But it happens.

Khanyisa: But it's not right. It's better the way it is. When you want your man you take your bag and go. It's good that way. It sets us free.

Nomkhosi: Does it not tie you down?

Khanyisa: How? Maybe others feel tied down. But we found things this way and we like it. Those who come later might have a problem. But it has to be like this because it is a women's hostel. What is your problem with the way our hostel is?

Nomkhosi: I look at it from a historic apartheid point of view. Conditions have been changed by the democratic laws. My understanding is that all hostels should become Community Residential Units.

Khanyisa: No, that wouldn't be right. It really would not be right to allow men to come in. Journalists came here every day to capture the different things which can happen here.

Nomkhosi: But this happens everywhere, for example, it happens too in the KwaMashu hostel. Even journalists know that so they don't go there every day. So now you are selling fruits, vegetables and sweets. Who do you sell for? Do you work for yourself or has someone who employed you?

Khanyisa: I sell for myself.

Nomkhosi: Is there another person who is in the same venture with you in this Business?

Khanyisa: No.

Nomkhosi: What do you do when you have to go somewhere else?

Khanyisa: I close business, unless I have the help of Thenjiwe. When people come looking for me and if I have left my room keys with them, they are able to go in to the room to get what the customer needs.

Nomkhosi: So when did you say you started selling?

Khanyisa: I started April last year—a little more than a year ago.

Nomkhosi: That's a long time. Are you able to see the difference that this business brings? If not you would have stopped it long ago.

Khanyisa: No, there is no money.

Nomkhosi: How much money do you make per day?

Khanyisa: I have never really counted it.





Nomkhosi: No, that's impossible. I know you do not make the same amount of money every day, but around what amount do you make?

Khanyisa: Well, sometimes if you are the only one selling without your competitor (the lady who sells on the goods), you find you chop the whole bag cabbage and it gets finished. Then you see that you are really working. If she is not there I would be under so much pressure [with sales], you wish she would come back.

Nomkhosi: How come you wish that she comes back when you make more money when she is not there?

Khanyisa: Yoh! This work is tiring, my dear. I am not going to lie to you. I do not do this with jealousy. There are too many people in this place.

Nomkhosi: This means you are not looking to grow this venture into a bigger Business? You just want to sell five pockets of chips per day and that's it?

Khanyisa: It's not that. As you can see, there are so many people here. It is just beyond my power.

Nomkhosi: So you feel there are too many people here?

Khanyisa: Especially in the evenings when they come back from work. It gets too busy.

Nomkhosi: I see that today you started working in the afternoon. Is this your normal time to start working?

Khanyisa: There are too many things to be done. In the morning you have to start by cleaning and doing other chores. Then you must still go out to order the stuff you are selling. Once you started selling you can't leave in the middle and go cook. You have first to do all those things before.

Nomkhosi: So what does your schedule look like?

Khanyisa: I start when I feel like starting. On Saturdays (*ngesabatha*), I start by going to church; then at 3.30 to 4pm I start. Even if I start late I still thank God as I do not go to sleep without selling a few items.

Nomkhosi: Which church do you go to?

Khanyisa: Nazareth.

Nomkhosi: Where do you go to church?

Khanyisa: Close to Musgrave.

Nomkhosi: Do you walk there?

Khanyisa: Yes.

Nomkhosi: When did you start going to that temple near Musgrave?

Khanyisa: I started in 1989.

Nomkhosi: When you first arrived here?

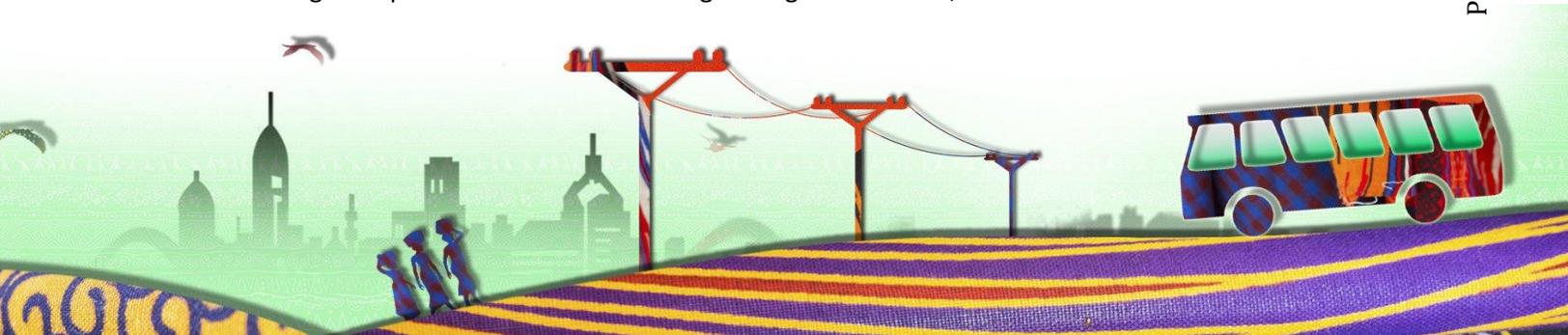
Khanyisa: Yes. Although when we were kids we used to go there occasionally.

Nomkhosi: Which church did you used to go to when you were kids?

Khanyisa: We grew up attending different churches, but our grandmother was always a member of Nazareth. So that's why I was saying we used to go there occasionally. But we did not quite like or enjoy the kind of music they sing. We thought this was a church for older people. When they had their big occasions in July, we used to go with our grandmother. While we were living in Hammarsdale, the Shembe church was not as large as it is right now. There were not enough people who could inspire you to continue with that religion. What we always saw were old men and women. But we didn't really know what we wanted.

Nomkhosi: You have stayed at Hammarsdale?

Khanyisa: That is where our roots are. We left that area because of political violence and we went to Folweni. In reality, after the violence that broke out, there was a time when we were going around looking for a place to settle. We did not go straight to Folweni, but we lived at Ndwedwe for a short





while. But life was difficult there especially because we were not born there. We realised that we had to go back where we came from. Then we went to Folweni which was in almost the same direction at Ndwedwe. There we settled.

Nomkhosi: Is there any other place where you settled?

Khanyisa: No, there is none. I don't count Adams because we didn't stay there for long. That was before we went to Ndwedwe. We were at Ndwedwe for about two years but we failed there.

Nomkhosi: You were moving with all the family?

Khanyisa: Yes, we were moving as a family. And we had our parents with us also at that time. That was around 1985 and 1986.

Nomkhosi: So how did you choose the Shembe religion in 1989? How did that happen?

Khanyisa: How did that happen?

Nomkhosi: Yes, because you were older at that time, where did the influence come from?

Khanyisa: As I have explained, our granny was involved with that church. Whenever we had to do ceremonies at home we had to follow the tradition and religion of our grandmother. We had to keep the Sabbath holy in our household. There were things that happened that really proved that we had to keep the Sabbath holy.

Nomkhosi: Do your children go to church? Do they observe the Sabbath?

Khanyisa: Yes.

Nomkhosi: The reason why I am specifically asking about this issue is that my experience at the KwaMashu hostel showed that most people are influenced in the hostel to join this church. Most of the people who live at the hostel attend this church. As a result, there are many temples, even inside the hostel. But there are also those who bring it from their rural areas ... So what are the things you like about the hostel?

Khanyisa: When I think about it, if I could get a nice place where there are RDP houses, I can continue with this business. If God has mercy one can get all the desires of one's heart. One would have to get out of this place and move on.

Nomkhosi: Why do you say that?

Khanyisa: No ... What is the surname of this place where we live?

Nomkhosi: Currently we are at Shangase's space (I pointed to her room and said that it was Msomi's space.)

Khanyisa: This is the municipality space. How can you say it is Msomi space? How can you even put down your own rules in this place? You can't say this is your place. You can't say I am the woman of this house. How can you say that in this room? You can't.

Nomkhosi: So what would you like?

Khanyisa: I would like RDP housing.

Nomkhosi: No, I mean at the hostel.

Khanyisa: I am forced to live here but I really do not like it. But [I am not over yet] with living at the hostel.

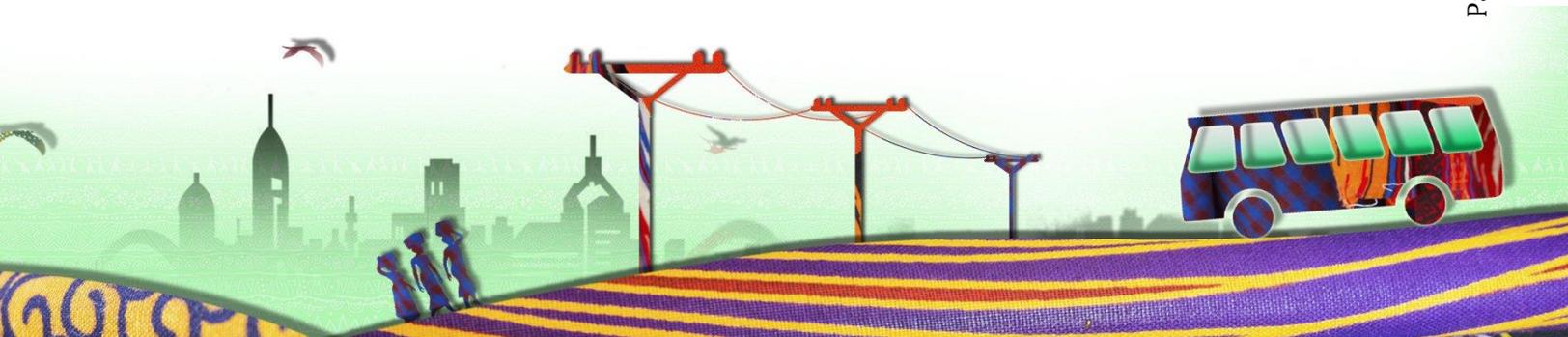
Nomkhosi: Oh! This means at some stage it was good?

Khanyisa: Do I have to be walking with a walking stick while living at the hostel?

Nomkhosi: But you are only fifty. You can't be fifty and say you are over [with living here]. Those who are 95 are [living here].

Khanyisa: Life can still go on. But where I would go? Where could you find a space for me?

Nomkhosi: Yes, it is true that life goes on wherever. But it still suits some people to be here because of work commitments.





Khanyisa: Yes. I can still work if I could find a job. I can work very well. Even if I could be accommodated there I can still work. But there is nothing as important as your own [space].

Nomkhosi: But if you could get an RDP house at Folweni, would you go back home?

Khanyisa: Go back home? It would depend.

Nomkhosi: Why do you say that?

Khanyisa: I would have to see how things go, and if the situation allows me to do things like that. What I really believe is that wherever you are, life can still continue.

Nomkhosi: That's true. How much are you paying for rent in your room?

Khanyisa: How much, Thenjiwe?

Thenjiwe: (Laughs)

Nomkhosi: I understand the rent is not the same for everyone?

Thenjiwe: No, it is the same.

Nomkhosi: How much?

Khanyisa: It is R47.

Thenjiwe: No, it is the same.

Nomkhosi: Are they the same?

Khanyisa: It is the same. It's different for those that live on the other side, those who live on their own in the single-bed room.

Thenjiwe: And the two-bed room.

Khanyisa: Yes, as well as the two-bed rooms. Those rooms were new when we came here.

Thenjiwe: We were watching them.

Nomkhosi: Did you not want to go into the new rooms?

Khanyisa: No.

Nomkhosi: Why?

Khanyisa: They were beautiful inside ... but

Thenjiwe: It was the money. Our rent was cheaper.

Khanyisa: It was less. But, Thenjiwe, what I said was that I do not like the stairs.

Nomkhosi: Is it because you were already based at the ground floor?

Khanyisa: I had not yet been allocated. I was only allocated here in 1994. I have never left or changed this room. I always tell myself that I would like to leave once through that gate.

Nomkhosi: In a coffin?

Khanyisa: No, no, no ... with my own feet. I do not intend to change rooms.

Nomkhosi: Do you get along with the people that you live with?

Khanyisa: Yes, we get along.

Nomkhosi: How many are you?

Khanyisa: There are three of us ... no, two of us ... no, three of us.

Nomkhosi: How many beds?

Khanyisa: Three.

Nomkhosi: And what about your child?

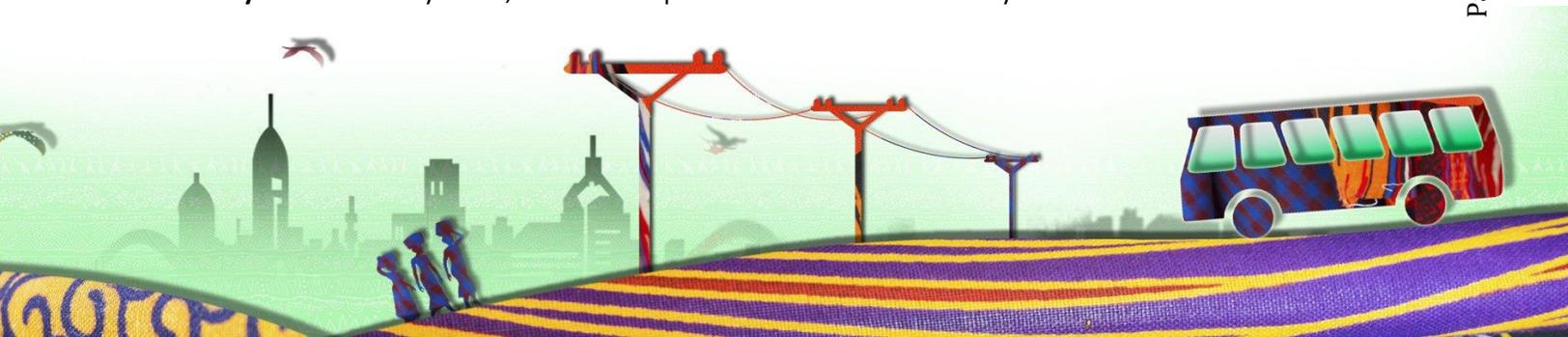
Khanyisa: My child is in a different room.

Nomkhosi: She does not stay in the same room as you?

Khanyisa: She used to but later she chose to go and live with her friends.

Nomkhosi: Do the people you live with not have children that they bought here?

Khanyisa: Even if they come, we can't keep them because there are only three beds in our room.





Nomkhosi: You don't have any extras in your room?

Khanyisa: No. If a lodger comes, she can sleep outside.

Nomkhosi: What if someone comes to share a bed with one of your roommates?

Khanyisa: It would depend on the two of you ... if you don't mind sharing a small bed. All I know is that we have small beds and I cannot share it with another person. When I am in my bed, I want to move around in a way that helps me relax. Nobody can bear with that in such a small bed.

Nomkhosi: Can I please ask ... do people actually share beds here? Does it happen that you find two people in one bed?

Khanyisa: No.

Thenjiwe: There are those [who are lesbians].

Khanyisa: Yes, there are those who share beds because of their friendships ... or whatever relationship they are in.

Thenjiwe: But a single bed is still small.

Khanyisa: I wonder what kind of sleeping takes place in that small bed.

Nomkhosi: (Laughs) In your long experience, have you seen lesbians who sleep together sexually in such beds?

Khanyisa: It happens, even with those who have been here for a long time. They decide that they can sleep together sexually in this room. This forces the one who does not have a partner to leave the room because you will not sit around and look at people making love in front of you. You have to go to superintendent and ask him to change your room—tell him that you watch filth in this room. Why would you not tell that to Nsumpa?

Nomkhosi: Is it still easy to get rooms? You say you can just go to Nsumpa and ask him to change your room?

Khanyisa: He would have to see what he can do. It is easier to be changed than to be allocated for the first time.

Nomkhosi: So people do sleep in one bed, regardless of what they do in that bed?

Khanyisa: They still do, although I think it's not too comfortable. Unless they have a sexual relationship, there is no freedom. Imagine everyday knowing that you have to share a single bed with another person! In reality one person is allocated to one bed.

Nomkhosi: So people do have sexual relations here?

Khanyisa: That's what the news people say.

Thenjiwe: Yes, they do and they don't hide it. They also get involved in domestic violence as well because of their relationships.

Nomkhosi: They beat each other as well? I like Mam'Thenjiwe because she does not hide the truth. (Khanyisa laughs.)

Khanyisa: Yes, they do fight for love and fight over their love.

Thenjiwe: Remember that one of them becomes a wife.

Khanyisa: *kuyaxatshanwa phela othandweni* (it's a matter of love).

Thenjiwe: One of them must prove that she is a man.

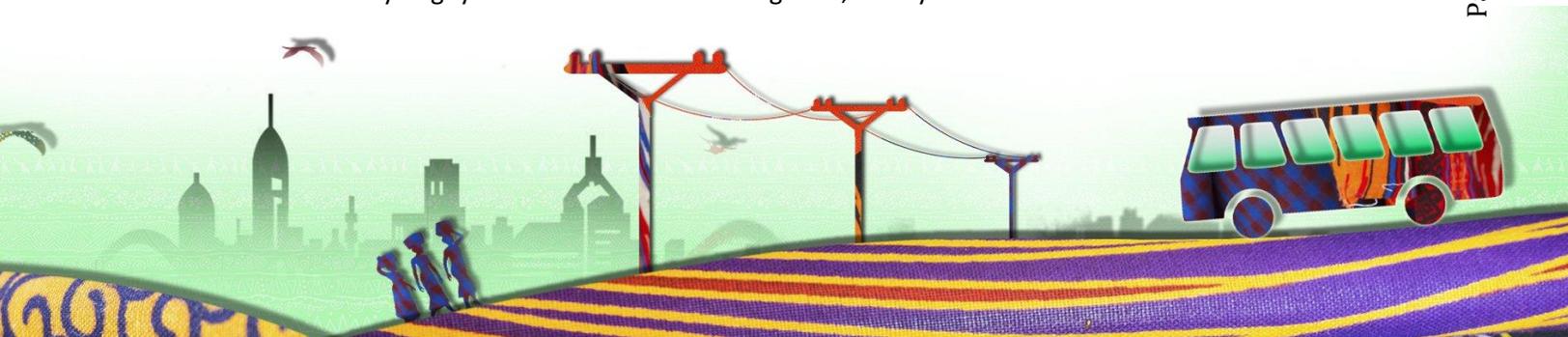
Nomkhosi: They don't hide that?

Thenjiwe: No, they don't.

Khanyisa: We easily see that this one is a man.

Thenjiwe: You would see one taking a cloth to tie up her breast so [her chest] can be flat.

Nomkhosi: Since you guys have been here for a long time, have you not seen this before?





Thenjiwe: No.

Khanyisa: No.

Thenjiwe: But Khanyisa, we are lying: remember Myna?

Khanyisa: Myna was here, but we were never sure of who she was involved with. This thing came out clearly with Nonhlanhla and Nokuthula.

Nomkhosi: Are they still both here?

Khanyisa: They are now married. I heard that they are married. We should not talk about that here.

Nomkhosi: Let's call them X and Y.

Khanyisa: Yes, they left this place. Myna was never easily identifiable. I still do not know who she was in love with.

Thenjiwe: You are lying.

Nomkhosi: (Laughs).

Khanyisa: The people we knew were these two.

Thenjiwe: Even Myna was known. She had a relationship with another aunty. Remember that when Myna died, that aunty buried her. There was another lady who used to live here who used to be involved with women. She was taken and sent to Johannesburg by the old municipality. It was found that she had masculine feelings in her body. Then she got a house at KwaMashu. The thing started a long time ago in this place.

Khanyisa: But it is too bad now.

Thenjiwe: Sleeping with another woman is abomination.

Khanyisa: Are you planning to defend it, my child?

Nomkhosi: No, I want to hear from you.

Thenjiwe: The bible is against it.

Khanyisa: It is because you do not know.

Nomkhosi: All I know is that the Constitution allows it.

Thenjiwe: That's wrong and is against the bible.

Khanyisa: Do you do it as well?

Nomkhosi: People are not the same.

Thenjiwe: You must always start with the bible, my darling.

Khanyisa: Is there a heaven for gays?

Thenjiwe: Is there really a heaven for them? There is none!

Khanyisa: Our God *unyazilezulu* (Shembe) tells us that there is no forgiveness if you do that.

Nomkhosi: Until you change.

Khanyisa: Change what? They are created like that.

Nomkhosi: If you change from being gay to straight.

Khanyisa: There is no such thing. Where do you come from?

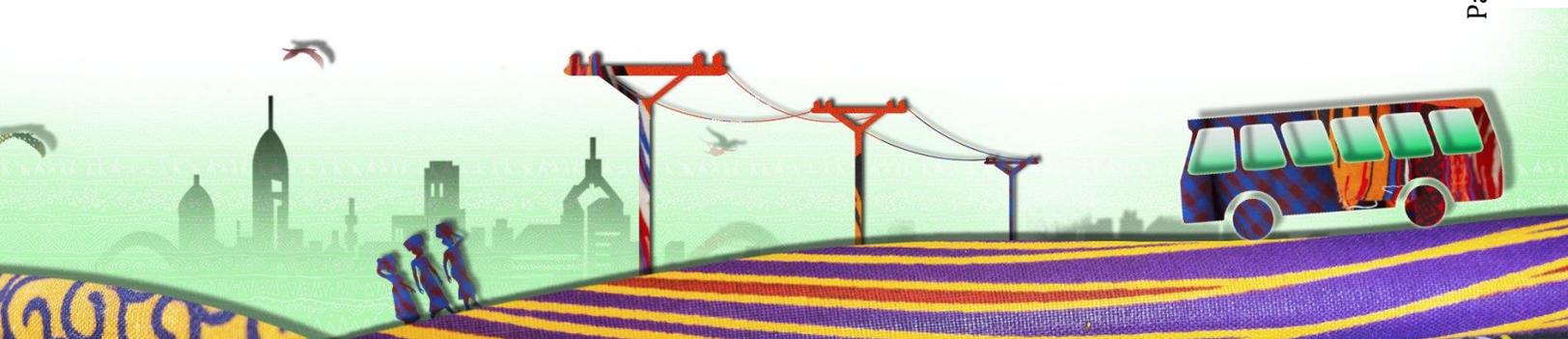
Nomkhosi: What about the small kids who after birth immediately take on different roles to the ones we are used to?

Khanyisa: Mmmm. What is it that they would have seen so that they start those lifestyles?

Nomkhosi: Sometimes they say boys who grow up with girls are influenced to act like girls, and the girls who grow up with boys tend to act like boys.

Thenjiwe: Such thing called *ungqingili* (transgender) exists.

Nomkhosi: What is *ungqingili*?





Khanyisa: This is when you were created as *ungqingile* even though you are not involved with anyone. You were born like that.

Thenjiwe: Your feelings are those of a boy even though you are a girl.

Nomkhosi: So you agree that such a thing exists?

Thenjiwe: Yes, that thing happens.

Khanyisa: Yes, but that does not say you should be involved (*qoma*).

Thenjiwe: You can't be menstruating today and tomorrow you are a man while you have breasts. What will you eat when you are menstruating? Who would you be sleeping with?

Khanyisa: (Laughs).

Nomkhosi: Please explain to me the concept of *ungqingili*.

Khanyisa: You mean you have never heard that?

Nomkhosi: No.

Khanyisa: Long ago, when I used to do casual work, there was a girl who was from the farms. She really liked being a girl and even her voice was like a girl's. But you were never sure what was happening—that she was actually a boy. He was *ungqingili*, and she never liked it when people said that to her. She even had the legs and the knees of a girl. She really would go to the extent of dressing up like a girl as we went to work. That was like something you have never seen. We used to dress up nicely in our towels and sarongs.

Nomkhosi: You went to work wearing that?

Khanyisa: Yes, you should have seen us.

Nomkhosi: Where did you work?

Khanyisa: On the farms in the 1980s.

Nomkhosi: So you guys are saying that the *ungqingili* would have different feelings but they should not act on those feelings because if you have the feelings of a man, obviously you will be attracted to a woman. The reason why I am attracted to men is because I have feelings of a woman.

Khanyisa: It happens that you have been created as an *ungqingili*. But now we see that people are created as women and they grow up living normal lives as women. They give birth to children and then they change and become lesbians. You find that they break up with their partners.

Nomkhosi: Maybe people are scared to show their real selves.

Thenjiwe: How can you do that for this long?

Khanyisa: You give birth to so many children—three or four—and the next thing is you change.

Nomkhosi: Sometimes you would be trying to make you parents happy.

Thenjiwe: *Hayibo* Nomkhosi!

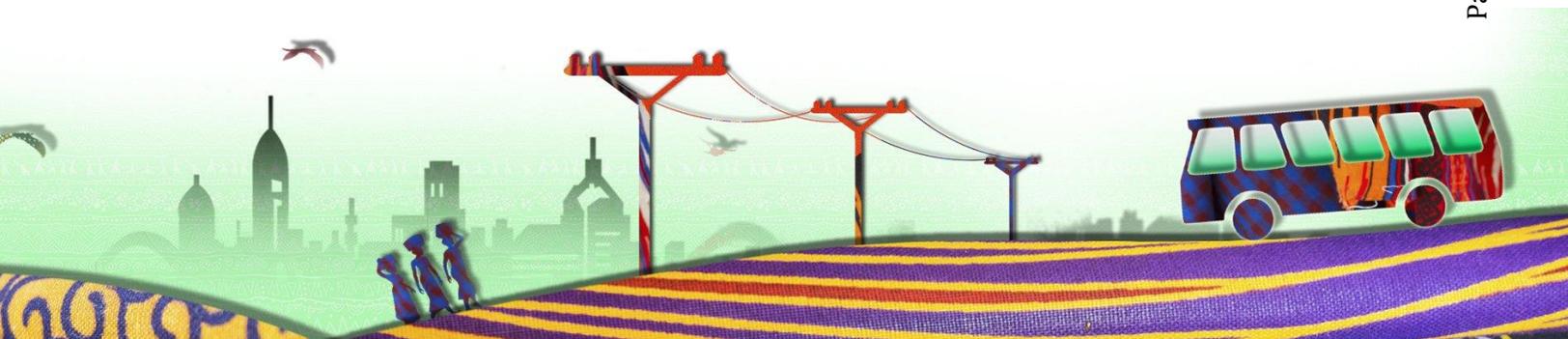
Khanyisa: *Ukukhohlakala nje* (it's just wrong!). One must just start at the beginning. Don't change later. You can't give birth to four or five children and the next thing you start having girlfriends. You are already somebody's mom. You may even have grandchildren and you start this lifestyle.

Nomkhosi: Do you have grandparents who are lesbian here?

Khanyisa: It is mostly young people, but people in our age group as well. As much as I am a granny to some children, you find grannies like me doing this thing in this place.

Nomkhosi: Maybe that's why the government should open this place for men as well because you women end up dating each other?

Khanyisa: There can be no such thing. We will not do that. When we came here we already had our boyfriends and we will not change that. What would be the problem now? There are so many men





out there. If you walk out of here, you will not reach YMCA before you can see a man that you can date. You think I can just start by loving you? No.

Nomkhosi: I think that living without men is also a problem.

Khanyisa: No, it does not do anything. What would I be thinking when I am sitting with you, because you are another person's wife? What changes from that?

Thenjiwe: A man would come to the gate and I would go to him.

Khanyisa: Yes, take your bag and go with him. Why would you want to sleep with another woman? No.

Nomkhosi: If one woman can approach you ...

Thenjiwe: Oh!

Khanyisa: Lord Shembe, king of kings, please remember me. I don't know what I would have done wrong—*mkhululi weziboshwa!*—to deserve that. Yes, I know they are not sent by their parents and their parents probably do not like it, but, God, you have to remember us and our children. Wheee ... no, no, no. This thing is ugly. This means I would not have a daughter-in-law.

Thenjiwe: Maybe my kids can do this right now as I have had a stroke. If I could see my daughter going with another girl saying they are in love, I can say "Wheeee!" For real? Oh my God!

Nomkhosi: I think this marks the end of our interview. I will come back another day.

Khanyisa: What would you be coming to say then?

Nomkhosi: Can people ever finishing talking?

Thenjiwe: No, Nomkhosi, you can go talk to other people now.

Nomkhosi: Next time I come here, I will start in your rooms to ask you to refer me to other people. I will not go to the office to do that.

Nomkhosi: Can I also have your numbers, so that I can call you when I am coming?

Khanyisa: Here we go. Now you want to propose love to [*shela*] us?

(We all laugh).

