

The impact of apartheid on a born-free generation.

Define born-free.

“Freedom is an illusion. It is oppression in disguise or a false fragment that makes that tongue feel lighter”, well that’s what my grandmother often says as she ribbons her stories of life before we even came into imagination. The stories of struggle I cannot fathom ever so slightly. I thought maybe I’ve been so absent minded I’ve stopped even trying to see the struggle people live in post apartheid, the hopelessness and starvation that has become the cycle of our livelihood. Struggle that has been painted in rainbow hues and integrated into our current lives.

The impact of apartheid on a born-free generation is the story of my life. Except I was never born free when home has always been a crumbling mudhouse plastered with cow dung as tiling. I tried to define born-free with my shackled mind, but it didn't work.

I can see the stories burn out from the soul left behind my grandmother's eyes.

I’m going to tell you a secret: take it and tuck it under your arms and don’t let it be known even slightly by wandering ears or let its wispy ends be seen.

Don’t make an assumption that I’m a bad person by the end of this, my only defence is that there was nothing I could do, maybe there was but with so many things going on it was hopeless.

I saw a white man, a very good looking man at that, he was talking to a pretty black girl with pin straight hair, they ended

up against a wall making out, I stood there and watched them, I shouldn't have. She told him to slow down, he didn't. He seemed proud of himself. I tried to shift. I contemplated running to go get someone but I thought about how I'd be told she was probably asking for it and why did she bother try to look white for him if she didn't want it. She started to scream, he covered her mouth with his own trying to silence her. Thrusting against him she started to beg him to take anything other than the sacred jewel of a black family, her virginity. The very thing that could take her family from nothing to something.

Gogo told me to always look down because what's the point when the white men still looked down on us. I didn't look down, I looked at them, I looked at him specifically, start to unbutton her jeans while struggling with his own. There was a tickle in my throat. I refused to let it bubble and do more especially when I knew I could end up like that girl. I thought of gogo and how her master did that to her and how my mother became the product of that and we soon ended up in a cycle of poverty that holds us by the throat because no one spoke up, no one's speaking up. I refused to help her, instead I turned around and tried to erase it from my mind. I should've helped but I couldn't bring myself to it. How can two girls defeat such a man against society, especially when society still isn't with us. Two women of colour against a man who is still deemed as a higher power. I can still hear her screaming and when I close my eyes, I can see her thrusting against him trying to free herself. If she's not free she must know we're together but maybe in different circumstances.

I'm chained by memories of struggle, the fear of being pushed down because I am a woman of colour still lingers heavily,

some may say they can almost smell it coming off me. Is it right for me to assume I would have been discarded to the side if I had stood up for that woman?

But then again what would I have fought with, a woman from nowhere like myself, who has the colours of poverty visibly strewn against her body.

I went home that day, home to the piece of land that my family got thrown at, maybe land is a hyperbola within the cluster its between. Apartheid took everything from us and hardly left my family's dignity untainted. Again am I born free or is it just an illusion, if I am why am I the woman of the house while my mother still tries to get something out of the nothingness of the world.

Why is it I am the one who must take care of the children as my own while my womb is bare?

I'm only nineteen but I've learnt the roles of those who are above and beyond my age.

Later that night I sobbed not only for myself but for every child that has been subjected to the past they've never been part of. I sobbed for the girl I could have been and maybe even the girl I left behind because of my selfish needs to climb up the ladder of society. I curled myself against the makeshift bed, a thin blanket layered by a "dogs fleece" against the hard floor near the "fireplace". I let the silence of the night eat at the thinning hope that cocooned our home with the few coughs I could hear coming from my grandmother.

Keep my secret and hopefully you'll see me rise against the odds but first I must raise those who will do that for us, for

our family.

The ruins of apartheid still run blood deep. They mark and scar those who witnessed it and like overflowing vessels they have started to bend and pour out what they should've taken and laid down as the base of their graves.

They are trying to heal while constantly dwelling on what they should be letting go. Instead, they're starting to plant new hatred that shouldn't exist, making us persistently think we're victims and deserve to get a silver plate of privilege placed on our laps. Those who were once slaves must be given a chance to become a king apparently so why am I being made a slave in my period of freedom?

Tell me how do I get out of this and become just a woman without adjectival labels?

Rules and Guidelines

The following rules and guidelines are applicable to the 2023 National Essay Writing Competition Against Racism:

- Participants must be between the age of 13-21.
- All entries must be accompanied by an entry form stating all details required of the participant.
- All entries will only be received via email (essays@kathradafoundation.org), or physical copy delivered to the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation offices (Signet Terrace Office Park, Block B, Suite 2, 19 Guinea-Fowl Street, Lenasia, 1827)
- Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.
- Plagiarized content will be disqualified.
- Essays submitted must be between 1000 -1500 words.
- Poetry and artwork must be accompanied by an explanation of no more than 500 words.
- Artwork entries must not be bigger than A3 in size.
- Competition winners from the past two years are not permitted to enter the competition.
- The competition is only open to participants residing in the Republic of South Africa.

NOTE: Non-compliance with these rules and guidelines will lead to the automatic disqualification of a participant