

SHEBEEN OF KHAYELITSHA

Thakhani Rayofafrica (South Africa)



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Khayelitsha Metropolis coastline.

NOSIPHO

Buzzing naval drones startle me every time, mistook them for danger. As a microplastics cleaner volunteer, I'm just as worried of the same people these drones hunt. They scan me until they're satisfied I'm no threat. Naval drones can't always keep us volunteers safe, from Cape Town's gangs-turned-pirates. They've established their territories on our once poorly protected Southern ocean. We also fear them taking our tech. Opportunists. The sun caresses my skin and I smile at my two BFF, the bionic flying fish. Altered descendants of the famous Atlantic flying fish species who've adapted here since the oceans warmed. I begin applying my face paint. Tradition. It's as my Amakhosa ancestors used to living near the coast of the Eastern Cape Province. It'll be scorching hot soon. Life in 2073. Last night, after finishing my Marine Biotechnology research on bionic flying fish, I concocted this traditional white paste. I start applying the paste, looking carefully at my phone's front camera. "Nosipho come back, it's too risky today!" My concerned ex-girlfriend texts.

Notifications also pop in from friends. I avoid them. My face paint dries, sticking on my dermis. It's the best sunblock. I throw my bff up in the air and they glide effortlessly. They ride in the air. I steady myself on this plastic speed boat, tethered to a different boat by rope.

I pet down my Afro into a dome and switch on my high-tech Afro comb. It creates a buffer zone of wireless networking like Wi-Fi, linking to my bff and high-tech beaded bangles on either wrist. One swift wave of my arm and the fish follow, turning in the air. The fins that help them fly like wings are laced with soft metals. Their speed impresses me every time. I press play on my phone and it blasts my Amapiano hits. Grooving to the beat, I dance feeling the music flowing through me. My arms wave around in the air, guiding the fish. I dance directing their paths like a puppet master pulling invisible strings. Down underwater, shoals of more bionic flying fish swim following my bff leading from the air. They fly through the water polluted with micro-plastics. Their bionic gills filter micro-plastics and deposit marbles of plastic balls into artificial stomach pouches.

My dancing routine of side to side hip tossing, has the boat bobbing on the surface. Bff rise and dive underwater every now and then. Their friends in large shoals follow the patterns of how I direct them. I usually do this every other day along with other residents of Khayelitsha. Solo today. Seeing the temperature climb I clutch my fist, signaling for my bff to return to my boat. They land breathing heavily, inflating and deflating. Quickly, I put them into closed tanks of regenerative water. Shoals of those other fish swim closer, spitting out marbles of plastics out of their artificial stomachs into my other smaller open boat. It quickly fills up.

I take a sack full of kitchen wastes from households, hotels and restaurants that Khayelitshans turn to feeds and compost. I throw as much as I can into the water. The fish come to feed on their rewards, as we taught them. The water surface bubbles and ripples like a boiling pot. A feeding frenzy. Even other species join the delicious feast. I start my boat. I miss the steady ground. But my heart is beating faster now. Looking over my shoulders, weary of what I've been warned online.

My boat speeds, heading towards the coast. It's an hour away. Maybe I'll make it. I speed looking over my shoulders as minutes die. That's when I hear that buzzing. Their engines roar just as much as their rage. Just like I was warned online. The glider surfer pirates of the Eastern Cape seas. I was warned that they're unpredictable in the afternoons. No use crying now. Honestly, I figured I'd be done earlier. Their gliders speed straight for me. "Hand over everything! Those bionic fish! No one outruns us!" One shouts.

I realize that they want to sink me. They're teen girls with a mean spirit and when I see their neon-red braids, long, flowing in the air I'm terrified. They'll take my tech and boat. Getting control of our trained bionic flying fish could help them expand territory over the oceans. I can't lose my tech, so many depend on my work. Where's those drones when needed?!

"Uzofa today!" Their pirate captain shouts that I'll die. A warning I don't take lightly, swerving my boat to my right. I continue speeding, practically flying over the waves, hoping my plan works. I see long ropes of seaweed farms. We grow thick chunks of varying edible seaweed that covers the ropes here. This bioengineered superfood seaweed mostly feeds inlanders where Kalahari Desert cities struggle with food. I grab one rope, hoping they'll take the bait.

They get closer. I turn my boat lifting the rope out from the waters. One after another, they struggle to turn in time. Their wind-catching glider blades hit the rope, breaking immediately and tossing the glider pirates into the waters. My heart races. I'll truly be safe once I'm on land. I speed to the coast thinking it's over. Soon, I see a big shadow cast over my boat.

"Mxm!" I slam the boat with my fist, enraged. I look up to see the pirate captain. My heart trembles. She's turned her sails into wind gliders to fly instead of surfing the water waves like a glider. I should've known.

"Noo! What?!" I yell. Today's work can't be in vein. I open the water tank, thinking fast on my feet.

"Sorry guys but we must sink her first," I say to my two bff, scooping them out. I throw them in the air before they know it. Spreading their fins, they glide in the air circling around the pirate captain. Eventually they take turns diving into her sails turned wing blades. They puncture holes into the blades in mastery aerial assault. I raise my hand and they fly back to my boat. Her wind glider struggles to catch the wind. She goes crashing into the water, making one big splash. There's no time to celebrate. I harvest the few seaweeds I see into my boat with a raker until it's enough.

The coast of Khayelitsha Metropolis appears in the distance growing bigger into my view. I'm more determined than ever to go to the party at the Climate Shebeen. We'll celebrate how far Khayelitsha Metropolis has come today. Today's victory. Almost losing my tech.

We're descendants of those who were once amongst the poorest in society. Khayelitsha townships and informal settlements as they were once known. Change started after our then new 'RDP housings' were a success. An architectural experiment by Africa's best eco-architects whom found each other at Shebeen of

Khayelitsha's lively events. It became a "Climate Shebeen" where many gathered for climate expo events. Building apartments from old shipping containers led to schools, a hospital and malls. Changing how we governed we truly saw a second wave of change. We elected a council instead of mayors. All government funds, payments and other expenditures were made public, online 24/7. Knowing Khayelitsha's transactions made all the difference. Ideas birthed at the shebeen.

Salaries increase with executing one's leadership goals, but not things that were your responsibility. We made leadership a position frustrating to those with nefarious agendas, but attractive to the selfless visionaries who wanted to develop us. With radical new-tech industrial revolution changes, Khayelitsha became a metropolitan city. A city adapting to a changing climate like the once pioneering Kalahari desert cities, so its citizens never struggle. I'm proud of Khayelitsha.

Reaching the busy coastline market, I deliver my plastic marbles and seaweeds. Everyone's glad I'm back with so much. Later, I shower getting rid of the ocean smell, those damn pirates. The shebeen party is what we're longing for as a metropolis. Tonight I come alive. The biggest climate leaders could be there mingling. Many more ideas we'll never know, birthed there.

Thohoyandou Megalopolis.

LANGANANI

My goodness I could be silly sometimes. I missed the morning bullet train to my Khayelitsha Shebeen gig. Still, I can't wait to perform for that prestigious Climate shebeen. The bio-fulled bullet train goes from Musina Metropolis here in inland Limpopo Province, all the way down to Cape Town Megalopolis, neighbouring Khayelitsha. It's an hour away by this train which connects to the whole African continent minding no colonial borders. The train became a catalyst to changes to migration laws. A free ride for all Africans. It's always booked. After debuting at the Khayelitsha Shebeen of legends today, this train might facilitate my musical tour, like Climate-musician legends before. I'm desperate.

I re-watch a viral video of the Amapiano dancer at the shebeen I'm going to. Her white face paint and energy has had the internet ablaze for days. I'm standing at a station platform where street markets infrastructure lines streets. People awaiting future employment work here selling farm produce donated by citizens of Thohoyandou from street gardens. I buy dried Thungulu berries and deep fried locusts. Mmm!

Deciding to hitchhike, I put out a message for everyone to know I need transport fast on Ubuntu hitchhikers app. I'm quickly overwhelmed with the love online. I notice five people going to Cape Town and pick one with the best reviews.

I'm carrying a Mbira guitar invented in the 2040s. It's got metal tines that I pluck, singing like my Vhavenḁa ancestors during rituals. Mbira, the spiritual musical instrument of my ancestors. When

nervous, I sing Zwidade songs just as my grandmother would to me when I got injured. I remember. Adapting to desertification, old mud huts were rebuilt with solar panel walls, even the conical roofing which was my job to fix. The weather like today, putting on new solar panels, replacing traditional thatched roofing grass. I fell so hard. Crying, grandmother sang me to sleep. I woke up to a rare soft platter of rain that night. Like today's rare rains. Rain is good luck.

“Come in Langanani!” the driver calls.

My ride's here. An old woman drives a monster truck with seats in the back.

“Ndo livhuwesa!” I thank her after she scans my card. She smiles gleefully. Her gold grills shimmering. She's happy that the government will lower her bio-fuel prices since she's giving us a free ride on the app. There's one other passenger. I wave hello. He seems uninterested. I am prepared for an awkward ride.

We pass slope fields of polyculture farms in Makhado Megalopolis where old women clubs race organic pesticide drones. I'm intrigued. Children cheer on from the roadside and I can tell it's a norm. I log to local trends and the children flood local hashtags with posts about who'd win.

The old woman slows down to talk.

“We won't go through Polokwane Megalopolis! There's stuff happening in the outskirts!” she announces.

She swerves west. The other passenger looks at me puzzled. We hold on as she drives past a former nature reserve. Other cars line up on the roadside. We peek out. Wildlife rangers chase poachers on the now dusty reserve.

“Get them! Get those monsters!” our driver shouts out rallying on the rangers. She stops the car.

Poachers turn around near the fencing. Flipping over, their car rolls spitting out passengers and the stolen rhino horns. A cloud of dust lingers while the rangers grab the injured poachers.

“I hope you filmed that! Those rangers planted GPS nanobots in those rhino horns. I’ll need to see the footage. I just had to come to see it,” our driver explains excitedly.

I nod repeatedly, forwarding that footage to her. Wasting no time, she drives off. It’s quiet again. Johannesburg Megalopolis is only minutes away.

I must’ve fallen asleep not long ago. I wake up to chantings I know very well. *Toyi-toyi* as South Africa calls our special kind of protests and strike marches. Birthed during times of fighting against the apartheid regime, *toyi-toyi* had become common even into democracy. We look outside the windows. People jump and dance on the blocked road. A classic *toyi-toyi*.

“It’s a climate justice protest,” the other passenger explains.

He’s scared just like the rest of us. Protests are so rare these days. They can turn violent. People sing and chant shouting at the Department of Climate Solutions. Many beam up hologram board signs and relevant hashtags of a protest.

“I’ll be getting off,” I announce. The driver opens the door so I jump out. I wave bye one last time. These protesters are my crowd. I squeeze through the crowd of protesters, feeling their grief and anger sweating off on me. Some begin to recognize me. They turn their phones in my direction, everyone in my face.

Making it to the front, more phones and eyes are on me. They stop chanting and dancing. No *toyi-toyi*. Instead, they hum together. My Mbira guitar intrigues everyone as I start singing from deep inside

where images of desertification in our Vhembe district homelands feel like they mist up to my throat. My voice whispers sweetness into the tired crowd. I play Tshingondo music with the unique sounds of Mbira tines notes. Some raise fists. Soon, like a wave, everyone joins as fists rise all through the crowd, down the long streets. They sing along to my songs about climate policies and getting back lands occupied by the last remaining capitalist companies. I am tired of being in part utopias while in the farthest parts of this country, as it's always been like this here, stay struggling and worst impacted by our crisis.

“All South Africans must be freed from the climate dystopia, even those far from our urban centres,” I speak one last time.

I walk away as they cheer. The toyi-toyi resumes. Their leader follows me.

“We heard you're headed to Khayelitsha. Well, your profile says so. Congratulations. Take one of our flight seats,” he talks in my ear. My phone beeps in my hand. He has sent me his flight tickets.

“Thanks!”

“It's ok. I'll get a reward from the government anyway! But get going before you miss the flight!” he says pointing me to a nearby hovercraft.

The hovercraft is big and green like a giant beetle. Their personal pilot scans my ticket and we're off above Johannesburg, one with the clouds. The other passengers who were part of the protest recognize me. I've really found my kind, this crowd. Khayelitsha shebeen party awaits.

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Khayelitsha Metropolis Shebeen.

LANGANANI

Upon landing, I'm escorted to my hotel near Khayelitsha bay. I don't have time to soak in the ocean views of a thunderstorm rumbling with the most beautiful lighting strikes. I pace around in my free hotel room made of recycled plastic marbles. I view old videos of climate-musicians from across Africa who's careers changed from here. My musical inspirations. I study lists of climate leaders, from scientists and politicians to artists, who'll be watching from around the world. The phone rings, I'm startled knowing it's time to go now. I take my Mbira guitar, plucking its metal tines to calm myself. I'm ready.

NOSIPHO

I queue with friends in the street, outside the shebeen. Other Khayelitshans dance together in the streets like a carnival. The bouncer robots check their carbon footprint cards. Most people fail meeting the rare carbon footprint mark, getting declined. We're allowed in. I wear retro Mapantsula street fashions with neon sneakers and a bucket hat like all my friends. I'm the only one wearing my white face makeup in the very dim shebeen party. It complements my outfit while we sit at a small bar, ready to party the night away. Classic music from Sho Madjozi's Kiswahili and Xitsonga rap to Brenda Fassie's Afro-pop and Bubblegum sets the party vibes ablaze. People flood the shebeen's center as the sun goes down. I hear notes of a beautiful instrument. I've heard it before, but not here.

My friends descend to the dance floor with everyone. The music is groovy and everyone is feeling it. Hips swinging, energetic footwork worships the upbeat electronic Tshingondo music. I look up to this artist breathing new life into the shebeen. She plays the Mbira guitar bobbing her head. Her own music intoxicates her. Her sparkling braids sway in the air. She's owned her stage. Her rock band signals for her to sing along. Her voice casts a spell over the cheerful crowd who lose their morals, overwhelmed by joy, bathed in neon lights.

LANGANANI

I see someone amongst the party animals. A woman making fire with her footwork on the dance floor. As I finish playing my song I notice that luminous neon white makeup paint. The song ends. I did it. I waste no time leaving the stage. Another artist comes up. She looks around when the new song starts. She's disappointed. When she turns to the bar, she sees my sparkling braids. It's her. She's beautiful. Attraction pulls us closer. We mirror each other with smiles. "You were so amazing up there! Congratulations!" she finds herself confessing.

"Thanks! You were one hot white flame on the dance floor," I say to her.

We hold hands and start dancing. Upbeat and groovy is the music. We can barely talk. We stare intensely into each other's eyes as our faces come closer.

"Never seen you here! You're going far. Everyone will know your name!" she says into my ear.

I smile, adoring the beautiful white face paint. She pulls me to a private balcony. While bands on stage play, we chat. We are watching the distant storm over the sea. We realise that we share a passion for justice, opening new ways of thinking climate solutions into each other's minds.