

Special Edition: Covid-19

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 **OSISA**  
Open Society Initiative  
for Southern Africa



A selection of pieces by  
young writers from Lesotho

# WordPower 2020

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All of our Covid-19 educational content is open source and available as free downloads from our website ([thehubatmorija.co.ls/covid-19](https://thehubatmorija.co.ls/covid-19)) or using the QR code below:



## Introduction

### The Hub @ Morija

The arrival of Covid-19 shifted everything for us here in Lesotho – as it did in countries around the world! At The Hub in Morija, we closed all indoor operations in March 2020. We transitioned into online activism, creating open-source, multimedia Covid-19 educational content in Sesotho, all available as free downloads from our website. We also began to hold outdoor educational sessions for children and adults. We’re looking forward to getting back to our regular programming as soon as it’s safe to do so!

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this special edition of our annual WordPower magazine, in which young writers from Lesotho have tackled the topic of Covid-19. The poems and short stories in this edition present multiple perspectives – that of a school teacher, a student, a taxi driver – and explore the many effects of Covid-19 on society and on individual lives. We’re also proud to feature the lyrics of ‘Nthoe Tjena’ – a song released by The Hub in 2020, featuring nine local artists expressing their opinions on Covid-19 in Lesotho, government corruption, youth unemployment, and access to education.

We would like to extend a special word of thanks to our core sponsor, the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA), who have funded the publication of this magazine.

If you would like more information on The Hub, we’d love to hear from you! All our contact details can be found on the back cover of this magazine. Happy reading and thank you for your support!

'Nthoe Tjena' uses activism to raise awareness of Covid-19 and its surrounding issues in Lesotho. The featured artists talk about the pandemic's impact on the economy, youth, and education, as well as political inaction, corruption, and misuse of funds. We call on our leaders to do better, and on all Basotho to step up and take care of one another.

Beat produced by Taks Beats

Recording/Mixing/Mastering by T-Mech

Additional recording by The Hub & Seasonal Entertainment

Download the track for free from SoundCloud or check out the music video on our YouTube channel using the QR codes or links below:

[soundcloud.com/thehubatmorija](https://soundcloud.com/thehubatmorija)

[youtube.com/c/thehubatmorija/](https://youtube.com/c/thehubatmorija/)



Many thanks to the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA) for their support of this music project.

## Nthoe Tjena - Lyrics

by The Hub (feat. Black Dash, Kafela, L-Tore, Revelation, Kot Inferno, Msoko Lara, Prime Zeik, Kardiak, Tokelo)

### Black Dash

**Chorus:** Hona ke koli-ea-malla  
Paka-mahlomola lefatše le ea lla  
Lefu le hana re lekalla  
Batho ba shoa ba fela ba hlokahala  
Ha ho sa thoe khotso pula nala  
Ho s'o thoe hlooho li tote mali a rothe  
Polotiki e sentse naha  
Re phela bo-nyamatsana sa phoofolo tse hlaha  
'Na ntho e tjena ke qala ho e bona  
Kea letšaba lefu la corona.  
Bana ba likolo ha re sa ba bona  
Bokamoso ba bona na batla bo bona?

**Verse:** Sick ena e kotsi kotsi  
E koetse mesebetsi  
Tlala e iphile matla thusa Ramaseli  
Haeso Lesotho re oetsoe ke tlokotsi  
Re sokola le metsi  
A ho hlapa matsoho  
'Muso ha o na kelo-hloko  
Le sechaba ba re busa ka bokhopo  
Ho hoholo ke liketseletso  
Tsa babelaelloa ba isoa litsing  
Ba sa thole tšebeletso  
Hona ke tlhekefetso  
Le ha hole joalo Basotho ha 'ne re itlhokomeleng  
Ha re ea likerekeng esita le mabenkeleng  
Re ikoaheleng re sanitize matsoho chaba sa Lepoqo  
Ha re loaneng 'moho maybe re ka thola khoro  
Ha re ka kopanyang maboko.

## **Kafela**

Look at the way the government got us drowning,  
We never had a choice  
They claim the youth is young to even have a voice  
But they get surprised when we opt for crime to fill the void  
While they're changing leaders like two sides of the same coin  
Come election day the change will never happen  
'Cause we electing different heads of the same dragon  
The pain of watching the government slowly killing our passion  
And they wonder why we stuck in depression  
The way youth is dying from losing hope, man is way wrong  
You swore to protect us, so who should we put all this blame on?  
'Elect me, I will do this and that', they sing the same song  
They win and they forget you're the reason they got a day job  
No matter what, we will drive through the weather  
'Cause it's passion that we have and now it's God-given  
Black child you should know that you matter  
Don't ever let them tell you different

## **L-Tore**

We been going through the worst, struggling just to make a living  
Been thinking 'bout the future and I fear for all our children  
'Cause for years we starved while politicians pocket millions  
And those who lost jobs resorted to pocket picking  
Every day another victim, this life is getting harder  
The lies say we're transitioning, seems we have a lot of talkers  
'Cause action is what is missing, it's like nobody's bothered  
But how do you expect a seed to grow when it's not watered?  
It's on us to take stand, in order to see a difference  
All we need to do is be consistent, pay attention to restrictions  
It's deeper than a mask, all it takes is just a touch,  
So you gotta wash your hands  
We're not the only country that has lost a lot of fam  
So taking care of yours should be your biggest task  
And together we can conquer any obstacle at hand

## **Revelation**

Living in poverty  
Dreams of better days  
A broken democracy (yeah)  
So many viruses  
Covid-19 taking too many lives  
Choosing who it's minusing, airborne  
New age Grim Reaper  
It kills without question, Jason Bourne  
Like the days of crusades  
And the ancient storm  
The days of the plague and the sacred war  
It ain't safe outside  
Please stay indoors  
Get a playstation, you could play with boards, philosophical  
Let's make a statement  
I'm a magician, make 20 million disappear  
Like Lesotho's government,  
Make it reappear in another bank account,  
Stealing for the sake of it  
New leaders, you better bring new change (come on)  
Sick and tired of a different suit, same game  
Tryna coup the same bag'a change (Dead Preziz)

*Chorus x 1*

## **Kot Inferno**

Lefatše le lerole fefo ke sa ntoa  
Covid-19 ea hlahafatsa libata  
Bana ba jang bathong hare lula ka matlong?  
Ea baka mofere-fere li-price tsa ferekana  
Moahisane a shoa ke tlala ntse re shebile  
Hoba hee nowadays everybody o ichebile  
Saka ke saka nkaeza eaka ke eaka  
Ka bloma ka phola ka hopola moo ke tsoang teng  
Kholumo-lumo ra e fenetha moo re hlahang teng  
Mali a ngoan'a Lepoqo 'na ke mo ke antseng

Ba re ke ntja-peli ha ke hloloe ke sebata  
Ke li raha hoseng ka matjeke phoka e letse ho bata  
Bacha ba heso tsohang phomolo e felile  
We got a mind that poverty can't kill  
We got the spirit that nobody could kill  
Sanitize and protect yourself

### **Msoko Lara**

Basotho ba Moshoeshoe ha re mameleng,  
Ska iketsa Thomas mamela keletso,  
Sehloho sa ho bona metsoalle e kena masihloane  
Polokeho ea sechaba e matsohong a hau,  
U hlope matsoho khafetsa khafetsa  
Roala mask kholumolumo e mahloana a naketsana,  
Ak'u behelle muso koana botebong ba pelo  
Phelo bona ke ba hau, re ithepetletsa  
Chaba sa Thesele le ea makatsa,  
Ke bona le soasoa empa chaba sea tsamaea,  
Ha re hlompheeng bo-'mè ka lapeng hobane  
Ke bona mohloli oa bophelo re be ngatana,  
Re phela mehleng ea bofelo Tlatla-macholo  
Re thuse joale re nke liqeto,  
Ha re ka robala jonna rea sekama  
Ha re tsoaraneng ka matsoho esere ra hlonama

### **Prime Zeik**

Gruesome conditions of living but we done made it out  
At a young age I learned to be man of the house,  
A red nose didn't make a hood nigga a clown,  
It came from the cat sniffing that Ha Matala provides,  
Started jotting as a means of running,  
From the reality that robbed me of my peace  
And then feed me nothing,  
Rocking only the flyest of clothes  
'Cause coming up we ain't had 'em,  
It's circumstance I suppose  
Idolising criminals and women with enhanced features  
What can schools teach us?

We saw the first lady get away with murder,  
But I know a sister who's in jail for abortion,  
They impaled her and that's sad...

### **Kardiac**

So it starts when the government ignores  
The people's plea, shuts the door then resorts  
To force  
All of us to just stay indoors  
While they all go out to get a full meal course  
I'm talking about millions, that's how it goes  
Politics ruin everything, there's nothing close  
With the rules and regulations that's now imposed  
Make it hard to use your brain, when your mind is closed  
It's hard to get a job without connections  
Gotta know who and who just to make an entrance  
Got you thinking about the time you had your graduations  
When you thought your certificate will make a difference  
Can't practice Math, you gotta practice patience  
When things don't add, you gotta go to basics  
When you have no cash, you gotta go to Vegas  
When your skin's all black, you gotta face the Matrix

### **Tokelo**

Ho thoe ke phela ka ho sebeloa  
Empa batsoali ha ba buoa kea iphanya kea mamela.  
Ha se khale hake rutoa ho thoe thuto ke leseli.  
Ke lutse le motsoali ha ho na moo re eang bobeli.  
Lithuto ntse li nfeta, kaha corona e ikakhetse.  
Le tlala e ikakhetse, le 'Mè oaka ha sebetse.  
Bahaisane maqeng maoba hake rongoe ke maketse.  
Bana ba teng, ba ntšetsa thuto pele ka lifono,  
Bohloko bo bokalo hoba lapeng ha hona lifono.  
Ha re hlapeng matsoho,  
Ha re sanitizeeeeeng ba Moshoeshoe le Kholu !! x 2

*Chorus x 1*

# The Cow Invader

## by Moleboheng Rampou

'Mooooooo....'

A sharp whistle, some distinct words, and a bell snap me back into the now.

'Wait, did he just call out that cow by its mother's privates?'  
I shake my head in disbelief.

Actually, hold on a minute! Ke nako mang? How long have I been sitting here? What was I doing? And whose cow is bumping around my place with big thuds, like someone lazily beating a hollowed metal drum? The sounds are literally coming from under my window; I can hear its deep grunts; I can hear the grass making that whipping sound as it tears it out the ground.

Well, at least I know where I am and why...I think! I'm sitting (although I just realised I'm cramping) on the floor in my little tin-can – that's what I call my trailer, because well...it's made of metal, hence the cow's amplified thuds.

My back is against the couch, and I'm facing the window where the sounds are coming from. I can't see anything else outside, except for the clear blue sky. My laptop, notebooks, scraps of paper, pens and pencils surround me like we've all convened for some world crisis meeting and I'm the chair.

'Snap out of it!' One of the saner voices in my head scolds me, as I try to achingly unfold myself and get the weight off my cramping legs, trying to stand. How was I even able to sit like this? It's funny how we sometimes surprise ourselves. When did I learn how to twist my legs into a pretzel and sit on them?

Pins and needles...pins and needles...Icchhuuu.

I buckle and plonk back onto the couch as I start stomping my feet back to life and my brain to the now, today. This cow... I really hope it is a cow... I made the assumption because of the 'moo', the distinct cow smell and what the voice said...so I really do hope it is a cow. Anyway, this cow must think I'm communicating with it or something, as it's still bumping against my tin-can.

I'm super annoyed: I still can't stand up, my legs are on fire, I want to give this cow and whoever is with it a piece of my mind, in choice words, face to face. I need to get to that window...

Day 8 of working from home! Or maybe it's Day 10, or Day 6, I'm not really sure anymore. I don't even know what day of the week it is. It's just one long day. The routine is the same: wake up, eat, work, eat, zone out, eat...you get the picture. A small-time version of *Groundhog Day*.

This forced isolation couldn't have come at the best, yet worst, time – for me!

Contrary to popular belief, I'm a loner. I see you shaking your head – don't, it's true...I am!

I love and enjoy spending time alone in my head. Believe me, you can get lost for hours in there. It's fun and educational. But I was also talking about zoning out; I do that a lot too. I lose time staring at nothing, mostly thinking of nothing. Both of these are like mini-holidays from reality, but nothing really prepared me for the drama and weirdness of the solitude in isolation.

Covid-19 scared the heebie-jeebies out of me, and I took it upon myself to stay away, isolate and close myself off. I even went and bought a padlock for the gate, which was usually almost always ajar. I knew that a padlock wouldn't keep away the virus, but it would minimise random folk coming up to my door, touching my door handle, talking to me. Now they 'knock' from the gate, and some come no further than the gate.

So, how is there a cow under my window? How did it and its curse-versed handler get into the yard?

I can still hear it munching happily, but from a distance now. At least it's no longer hitting the tin-can. Other than that, everything is eerily quiet, with some churchy music floating in and out in the distance. Ke Sontaha?

The pins and needles are gone; time to stand up and see who came into my yard without permission.

It's truly a beautiful day: the sky is clear, with not even a single cloud. The breeze is just right; I should take a walk after this. I look out the back window: no cow, no handler. All I see is the big field of red dry soil and what I believe are peach trees preparing to sleep for the winter. Is it winter? It's not that cold, but it's also not that hot.

Did I imagine the cow? It's too open for them to have hidden. Maybe they're in the front yard?

I look around frantically as I step out. First of all, the gate is still closed. What? It looks locked from here. It's rather unnerving to think I might have imagined a whole cow and handler. Where are they?

I'm spending too much time alone, or am I? I sometimes lose track of time. But I haven't yet had any hallucinations, like now... but is this one?

'Where is this cow though?'

The yard I live in is huge, so maybe they are somewhere in the field behind the main house, I hope.

I turn the corner. Open field, red soil, gnarled dry trees. No cow or handler in sight.

I don't know what time it is, what day it is, and I'm pretty sure I have no idea what's happening. I'm going to take a nap; maybe when I wake up, the cow and handler will be back.

The reality is that I've been spending a lot of time alone, in a good way, and also in a bad way. Good in that I've re-ignited my quest for loving myself better; it's now a reality – right in my face. Bad in that my overactive imagination is now starting to play tricks on me. I'll eat, then sleep – that will bring everything into perspective.

One thing is for sure: the endless days, bouncing against the walls by myself in this tin-can have changed me, mostly for the good, and I really hope I'll keep learning.



# 'Mamahlomola (Queen of Sorrow)

by Thembekile Mokhosi

Ke thope ea lichaba mosetsana bofihla. A kena ka lenyele likhoba li sa qhanollotse.

O hlaha machabeng koana a ntsa tebuka, letheke o le tsokotsa sa mokana eka o tla tloha a famola pokoma.

Hase thope feela ea mofo; Makhokolotso, o hlahile ka korone ea khauta Seila-tsatshi.

Bang ba re ha se korone ke moqhaka oa meutloa. Che! Che! 'na kea latola ba Lepoqo.

Ha ke re le hore fara! Hona ke korone ea khauta e ntlafalitsoeng Mollong!

U ka e bona ha e phatšima tseke! Tseke! Oa fahloa!

Bo-ramahlale, Bo-nka-e-leka ba nile ba e qhautsa mabaleng a toropo, Ba e beha tlasa komporo ho e hleka-hleka ka lipotso.

A bobotheha mofumahali oa lefatše, a tsota ho phasa-phasahoa machaba,

Ho phasa-phasahoa machaba ho tlotla boteng ba enoa kharebe ea lefuba!

Khabareng a nto thetha seohlola a khoesa maleme a merabe eohle, Ntsoe la hae la tšekalla le maoatle, la phunyeletsa le lithabeng la ba la tla fihla koano lapeng!

'My crown is a master key to all human body doors!'

Ha u kaba oa utloa oena!

Hoa phasoa-phasoa maoatleng, bohle ra nyemotsana sa lira li pata mohoasa.

Bang ba re hona bang ba re hoane!

Bang ba bipa 'nete ba e etsa pinyane!

Tsa qala ho hlothana ka meriri naha tsa ho hafa ka nkatana!

Ba supana ka menoana ba tšepisana ea liphaka!

U e loana joang nto e le hlaile lesumatha moferekanyi?

Ha a ema feela mofumahali oa lefatše, o oa namalla, o busa ka sabole, o busa ka bokhopo, Bo-ichu! Ichu! Bona o hana ho ba bona, o ba hleka ka leleme o ba nyametsa 6 feet!

O oa tlola-tlola 'Mamahlomola, o larile meeling ha a na tšoarelo.

Oa se fohla sephethephethe a ba lo tsoa ka nqane!

O ba beha mealong ba senang tsebe.

Ba beile likepi fatše bo-ramethokho, ha se bokoala empa ho thoe ena koatsi e batla libalibali!

A le qhala letšoele game e sa tsoa qala, ba pheile likhang bo-ralimpana, makeja-kejane, mesuoe le mesuoetsana!

Ba bohle maphako a uba, o re nyahlalisitse lisui 'Mamahlomola,

A re ntša mejo hanong thena li sa re li tla leqetsa.

Helele helele!!! E utulohile koma e 2020! Ebe ke ha le timela lefatše ha ho etsahala tse?

Jonna ra shoela ka mekhorong oee!

Re kebetse pele ho thiba ho korotla hoa mala.

A koetsoe ka tsa toronko mahlafi!

Ha u ka hlaisa nko ka ntle lea u patlotsa lesole!

Bahaisane ho hoelehetsanoa ka masobana la lifensetere

'Le re e fela neng corona ka ntle ka moo?'

# Chronicles of a teacher during Covid-19

by Thejane Malakane

All was going well for Selebalo, a teacher at Raliemere Primary School. 'Sir Sbi', as he was affectionately known by his students, was a forty-two-year-old family man with three kids: two boys and a girl. The slight wrinkles on his face made him look older than his age.

The first time he ever heard about Covid-19 was when he was watching television and it was spreading like fire in Wuhan. For a teacher like him, international news didn't matter much, as he worked in a remote rural school in Mokhotlong. 'These strange diseases won't reach us here at Ha Raliemere'.

The month of January came as expected: full of energy, zeal, and projections for the New Year. The anxiety of handling a new class altogether engulfed Sbi, but he was looking forward to this new experience. He had mapped out the class activities of the first quarter with precision, but little did he know that all his plans would shatter in no time.

Reports were being aired on many news outlets, and on various social media platforms, that the first cases of Covid-19 had been registered in distant African countries. To Sbi, however, these cases still seemed far away, and he still thought it was impossible for a case to be recorded in Lesotho.

As the local saying goes: 'When South Africa coughs, Lesotho suffers cold'. When South Africa recorded its first Covid-19 cases, Sbi knew that Lesotho would undoubtedly be next. With the fear that cases might already be present in Lesotho, the government prepared a national lockdown that would see even schools closing. The closure of schools meant that Sbi, like all other teachers, would have to find ways to connect with his students remotely. But there was a challenge: Sbi had no exposure or experience with remote teaching using digital technology.

The only things that Sbi could do on a smart phone were check his messages on WhatsApp, look through his newsfeed on Facebook, and do some simple Google searches.

A few months back, he felt stressed when he learnt that some teachers were using digital tools to reach out to their students and to continue to give them lessons. He had no experience with using technology in this way, and thought he should keep up by attending teacher trainings that focus on digital integration in education.

Now that he's been home for nine full months, he feels quite uncertain of what the future holds for his students, especially as to what is going to happen to them next year. Will they have to repeat the same class, or will they be promoted to the next class? He frequently meets his students in the village playing all day, or tending to animals in the veld. Last week, he heard that one of his students was caught stealing food because she was hungry. This news brought sadness to him and he decided to give some food items to the girl's family.

Another month-end has come, and now Sir Sbi is wondering when the Minister of Education will announce the date on which schools will reopen. As other teachers put it, their monthly salary at the moment is a 'sitting allowance', because they get their salaries while staying at home, doing nothing.

## Bo-ea-batho

by Liteboho Molato

Letsatsi nkemele, meriti e se e mathile.

Ba itse maea ke maboea ba ileng ba tla khutla.

Ha ho nko ho tsoa lemina.

Nkhono o ile a khaoleloa litšiu tsa ho qetela ke batho ba motse.

Ka utloa lerata ka khitla empa kelello ea hopola hore ekanna eaba ke seea-le-moea. 'Pota ka nqane!' Ke utloela borokong bo monate.

Nako e nyenyane ka phahamisa hlooho ho tloha mosamong. Mahlo a ne a le boima empa ha ke utloa molumo oa batho kantle, letsoalo la kututsa. Ka utloa ke holla sekupu ka sefubeng saka, meriri ea shoashoabana.

Ka sheba Nkhono a lutse holima moalo a maketse. Mahlo a hae a ne bulehile haholo ho fihlela a nanabela rosari ea hae a atamela pela lebone la parafini a ntse a etsa pontšo-ea-sefapano. A nyolla khanya haholoanyane hore a tsebe ho hlaha a bone se etsahalang kantle. Le pele Nkhono a tšoara loko ea lemati, ra utloa lerata la majoe a otlang lemati, Nkhono a leka ho tjekela moalong empa a khoptjoa ke pitsa eo a neng a beile metsi a ho hlapa ka phirimana.

A otlala ka sefuba fatše, ho so fete nako e kae ka utloa ho nkha mosi oa patsi e metsi. Ka hoelehetsa Nkhono empa Nkhono o ne a se a sa tsebe ho tsamaea. Ka ema moalong ke leka ho mo thusa empa matla aka a ne a fokola. Ka utloa ho futhumala ho hoholo ka tlung eaba kamora nako ke hlokomela hore marulelo a tloa lelakabe. 'Ha bolaoe, o qetile maphelo a batho ka botsetsele.' Thabelang Khaitseli eaka e nhlahlamang o ne a se a phaphame, Moroesi setloholo sa Nkhono sa khorula, o ne a bo otlatse holimo moroetsana.

Ka mo potlakela ka mo beha beha sefubeng ho mo baleisa mollo. Thabelang o ile a ntša e meng ea mekotla ea rona ea liphahlo empa ho ne ho sena ea ka thusang Nkhono ho mo pholosa ka utloa mpama e lla lerameng ha ke hetla ka teana le letsohohali le ileng la nthimolisa mokola. Hoa re fi!!

Leronthong ka phahamisa mahlo ka bona ntlo ea lapeng e neng e lokisitsoe ke Nkhono ka litema le mahakoe e cha joalo ka toti.

Lentsoe la hana ho tsoa, mangoele a sitoa ho mpepa. Seboko sa Thabelang sa nhlaba habohloko pelong empa batho ba motse bona ba ne ba nyakalletse ba khotsofetse. Sello sa tsuonyana ha se hlomole phakoe ke bone. Nkhono o ile a lahlehela ke bophelo. A qosoa ka boloi, ho thoe o jesitse batho ba motse sejeso me ba sitoa ho phefumoloha hantle.

Nkhono a ke ke a khutla.

Nkhono o ile bo-ea-batho .

# A strange new world

by Tsebo Makakole

It's quiet.  
It's noisy.  
Which one of those is happening?  
I mean, where am I?  
I hear people screaming, crying, and shouting,  
But I also hear nothing,  
Not even the sound of a fly.  
'Ke liheleng moo?' I asked,  
Scared and frustrated.

Later, when my heart pumped  
Its first blood,  
I felt the cool breeze air,  
Coming in through my window,  
And I found myself lying on my bed,  
Thinking about the world of corona.

I took a slow, deep breath,  
And released the air out.

Life (bophelo) and death (lefu)  
Are fighting against each other.  
I don't understand what's causing the riot,  
Until my ancestors whisper in my ears.  
I become speechless and numb,  
And loneliness strikes.

It's sad and monotonous,  
Ha lefatše le le lipakeng tsa khanya le lefifi.  
Our loved ones are dead already.  
Rea shoa ke kokoana-hloko ena.  
What should we do more?

Mahlo a ka a qhitsa likhapha ke kutlo bohloko  
Ha 'Mè le Ntate ba ntšihile ke le lesea le litlhoko  
Ka baka la kokoana-hloko ena e bokhopo,  
But I know that God is watching over me.

We live in a strange new world.  
A world where we must always wear a mask,  
Sanitize and keep a distance from one another.  
A world where abuse, rape, and crime  
insult our freedom and rights.  
A world where relationships have ended.  
A world where work and food are hard to find.  
A world where the life of a human being  
has completely changed.

Ntate, here we are, kneeling in front of you,  
Re kopa u mamele lithapelo tsa rona,  
U re ntše lefifing lena la coronavirus.

Khotso, e be teng.  
Pula, e ne.  
Nala, re khore.

# The Cage

by Selebalo Molefe

Looking around I see this cage  
Ba re khaqa khiqi Likhopo tsa hae  
I am locked down  
I can't move  
My mind is everywhere  
I can't focus

I'm losing my mind. Yes, I'm losing my mind. Why now? Where did this Covid-19 cage come from? It has locked the whole world down. It doesn't care whether you're rich, poor, smart, or stupid. Where did this thing come from, and why now? I'm stuck in this cage with everyone else, and I can't break out of it. There are soldiers out there, they beat everyone who tries to break out. Are they immune to this Covid thing, or can they shoot it if it attacks them? I don't understand.

I'm sitting alone in my single room on a camp chair, staring at my old laptop and trying to work. Two pots on my two-burner stove are boiling, but I've totally forgotten about them. Suddenly a sharp smell hits me. Something is burning – ebe keng ntho e chang? I ask myself what it could be? Ekare nama – it smells like meat. Looking around, I see a brownish pot and the smoke coming out of it. Damn, my meat! I put my laptop down and rush to the pot, trying to remove the lid, but I get burned. Hele ebe ke tlo jang? I ask myself what I'm going to eat. I turn the stove off, walk to the window, and open it. Mxm, why was I thinking about this Covid-19 thing? I open the door and walk outside.

It's so quiet and very hot. The land is dry and plants are dying; it's so hard for them to survive. I can hear the faraway sound of birds. I walk over to a spot of shade and sit down. I'm trying to concentrate on the birds' singing, but I can't. I'm still thinking about my food and Covid-19.

What am I going to do? This is so boring and depressing. Let me go out, just to take a walk and think.

I'm 50 metres from the house when I see a soldiers' van passing on the main road. Damn, ba tlo nkotla! Four of them are at the back of the van: two on one side, and two on the other, sitting back-to-back. They're in full uniform, with big guns, as if they're about to fight an enemy.

Should I go back, or will I run like others on the street? I laugh at myself: I don't have the body e tlo tekhoa ke masole mona.

My mind is back but, to be honest, Covid-19 ea tena. Let's hope we will get back to normal. Really? Normal? What normal? 'The new normal'. What new normal?

A normal where we will find a way to work as a team.  
A normal where we will find a way for kids to learn.  
A normal with no corruption.  
A normal where leaders care for the people.  
A normal with no police brutality.  
A normal where unemployment is not a problem.  
A normal where nepotism does not exist.  
A normal with a low crime rate.  
A normal with youth in parliament.

All of this can happen because of us.

We can be the change we want.

## Facing the storm

by Mpho Chabeli

Tefelo had been silent for weeks in a five-roomed duplex in Marabeng, Berea. He was usually a nonchalant person but his wife, 'Maliau, knew that there was something bothering him. 'Yes, my husband is not much of a talker, but this silence is bothersome. He doesn't joke around anymore, and he isn't as goofy as usual. He won't face me when I ask him to tell me what's wrong,' 'Maliau thought out loud to herself, unsure of what to make of all of this.

Tefelo had been doing some thinking too. Lockdown was at its peak, and the soldiers were whipping and injuring the villagers. He had no interest in being a victim of such brutality. His son, Liau, and his daughter, Tšepang, were going hungry. The schools were closed and they were home all the time. His taxi had been parked in the yard for four months: petrol was expensive to only travel a hundred kilometres, with just seven passengers who always came with the same stories, trying to negotiate a lower price – because their money was also running out. So, one day, he decided that he would stop wasting his money on petrol.

Tefelo sat on the swing he had hung from one of the big apricot trees in the garden, reminiscing about the day he had bought his Toyota Quantum. He remembered the cool breeze and the city melody of hooters and market traders – 'Rea tsoepela Mocha-o-chele le Buddie' – and the offers on the other end – 'likausi ten Ranta Durban Lesotho'. The sun had shone brightly among the white scattered clouds on that day scented with wealth and success. My first day with my money maker, my taxi! What a good day, he thought, remembering how satisfying that was.

He thought of how his mother had told him to start a shop: 'Tefelo, makoloi a Manyesemane ha le ke be le re a robaha feela? Ke nahana u qale café ngoanak'a e tle e u phelise.' But he had rejected the idea: 'Café e ea lieha 'Mè, ke batla tekesi, e tla potlaka, ebile ke tla tseba ho patala banka ka potlako'. That's how he had come to buy his Toyota Quantum: 15-seater, silver, 2006 model, with a roof carrier, an engine capacity of 2.5L diesel, 3.5- 4 auction grade with Jevic.

Tefelo had listed the specifics of his car, just the way he had wanted it. He had taken out a bank loan and had used his life savings to purchase the taxi. He had served as a sales agent for half of his life, and although he knew how to drive, fate had never allowed him to explore that skill. He had dreamt in his younger years of driving for the Nthane brothers, as he had heard that they paid their drivers handsomely, but his dream had not come true until he had been able to afford his own taxi.

'All he does these days is slumber on that swing. I don't even remember the last time he teased me, let alone touched me. He doesn't even want to eat. I wish I could prepare some mustard chicken for him – his favourite meal. But we barely have enough mealie meal in the house, let alone meat. This lockdown has got to stop before we die of hunger. On the other hand, we still have to pay school fees, for what? When the kids are here at home.'

'Maliau said these things to her mother-in-law, who saw the agony and distress in her daughter's eyes. 'Matefelo couldn't console her; she struggled to say anything. To her, the whole lockdown thing and 'corola', as she called it, were too far fetched to understand. She was in her 80s, and to her it all resonated as one of the folktales she usually told her grandchildren – 'Kholumo-lumo ea ho ja sechaba kaofela...' – but this one was invisible, no one had seen it and no one had touched it.

'Aooa, this whole thing is above me,' 'Matefelo said, as she patted herself in search of her snuff container. She sniffed it twice and turned her face to 'Maliau: 'I don't even know what this corola is.'

'Maliau stood up. "Mè, I doubt my marriage will overcome this. Waiting for him to talk is like waiting for rain in a drought. It hurts, it's tiring and, even worse, it's disappointing.' She continued to murmur as she made her way into the kitchen to prepare food.

One Monday, Tefelo woke at 4am, the time he would usually wake up when he took his taxi out for a day's work. 'Maliau was woken by the sound of the engine. She stretched her hand over to the side of the bed where Tefelo slept. 'He's gone!' she exclaimed in disbelief. She jumped out of bed and fiddled through the wardrobe to find something to put around her shoulders.

Her hands landed on Tefelo's trousers, and she pulled them around her absent-mindedly. 'This man will be the end of me; he has been quiet for two solid months, then boom! Out of nowhere he decides to do this,' she said, as she made her way outside to see what was happening. She stumbled over and almost fell.

Her husband let out a warning: 'Hey! You will fall, look down, there's water on the floor.'

She came back to her senses and saw that she was in the kitchen, making her way to the door. 'Motho oa Molimo ke eng hantle ho etsahala eng?' Maliau said, as she took the mop from Tefelo's hands and mopped up the water.

'Sit down, let's talk,' Tefelo replied, pulling out a chair for her.

'Maliau dropped the mop on the floor, in disbelief that her husband was actually talking to her, and in his normal, happy tone.

'I've decided to take the taxi out,' Tefelo told her. 'I can't continue like this anymore; we're living hand to mouth.'

'So, what about IVECO? What are you going to do?' Maliau cupped her face and asked with concern in her voice.

'Well, other drivers still make it every day. I'll live in the same way, the hide and seek way! What else can I do?' Tefelo responded, shrugging his shoulders.

'Well, let's pray then,' said Maliau reluctantly. She reached out for his hand and said a short prayer.

'Don't worry, nothing will happen, my love. And take off my trousers from your shoulders, you look insane.' Her husband giggled as he shut the door behind him.

'Maliau was left laughing to herself. 'This Covid has really twisted me, ha eba motho u se u nka marikho e u a etsa tjale? Win!' She clapped her hands and made her bed. She went about her usual chores, but could not shake the feeling of worry in her gut. This feeling was usually never wrong.

'This IVECO was abruptly introduced to the nation. It started off well, like everything else in Lesotho.' Maliau started talking to herself. 'IVECO is said to be a mobile court, enforcing traffic law compliance, but for some odd reason it seems a rip-off. I heard people are fined five hundred Maloti! Ke hore chelete e kalo-kalo ho thoe e tsoa kae? Ra tla ra le bona likhutsana.'

'Maliau spent the whole day in her head. She just couldn't relax about her husband being out. When time for supper came, she set the table perfectly, but her husband still wasn't home. The more she thought about it, the more the bad feeling intensified. At 8pm, she called her children to the table to eat.

'Where's Ntate?' Tšepang asked. This was the first time they had eaten without him.

'It beats me. Now eat your food before it gets cold, and close your mouth when you eat!' Maliau dismissed her daughter with a stare.

When Tefelo finally came home, there was worry and disappointment written all over his face. 'Liau, take your sister and go to bed,' Maliau ordered. After her children had vanished from the room, she turned to Tefelo with a pouncing heart and a mind full of questions.

'How I hate my intuition,' she thought to herself. 'What it predicts always comes true. I had no reason to have a bad feeling and now the universe has served me what I ordered. Oh! Ntat'a Liau! What's wrong? What's happened? Can't the Universe see we are already bleeding spiritually, emotionally, and economically?'

Her husband was also lost in his own thoughts, and out of his mind with worry. 'What will happen now? I promised Maliau a braai pack, and now I've come back empty-handed. I can't believe the IVECO fined me 500, that's all the money I made today, now I'm back to nothing. Should I sell the taxi? All it does now is take the little money I have. My wife is going to leave me for sure. How will I keep this house running? What of my children, how will I keep them in school? What about my mother and her poor health? I can't afford her medical bill now, I'm all out. Maybe I should sell the house – it would give us some money to keep us afloat.'

The two had somehow floated in their respective dialogue bubbles – internally boiling and panicking. They collapsed onto their bed. When they regained consciousness, it felt like one of the sunlit mornings, before Covid-19, when business had been good. When innovations in transport and law enforcement were not disrupting the local taxi market, and travel was still easy. Now, their marriage was going through the ‘for better or for worse’ section of their vows. ‘Maliau gave a strong comforting smile that drew Tefelo away from his worries.

She looked at him with a gentle, happy gaze and said: ‘Let’s get back up, and continue to live by faith.’

Tefelo was comforted by his wife’s strength. He knew he could count on her to face the upcoming storm.

## Slipping

by Liphoh Tasha Thoahlane

I had been sitting on my bed for almost two hours after hearing the news that we would be going into lockdown. Finally, I stood up to make coffee. I looked around at my tiny kitchen with its cracked walls, and up at my ceiling that would probably fall off if heavy rains would come. I hated this house but I had no choice. I thought I was calm, but now tears dripped down my cheeks. I started to feel dizzy, and as I tried to hold on to my bedroom door the handle came off. It was as if a switch had been turned on and I started crying. I was back at that place. That place when I was a little girl and I went to town with my Mom for the first time. It’s a hot sunny Saturday, and there is the sharp burnt smell of chicken feet everywhere, as well as the hooting of taxis at every corner of stopong. It’s month end, and people are carrying big bags of Moratuoa rice and are pushing, in a hurry to get into the taxi to open their ice guavas and cool down from the blazing sun.

‘Tšenola, Motimposo, ua palama?’

My mother’s sweaty hands are starting to slip. I’m trying to hold on. The heat is unbearable even under an umbrella. My hand slips and my barbie doll falls to the ground. I bend to grab it and, just like that, my mother is gone. I can see the bright light and it’s a confirmation that she really is gone. My heart starts beating like a drum, and I can’t breathe properly. Someone is blocking my oxygen tank. There is sweat dripping all over my face and I can feel the earth moving, going around in circles, and I’m down on the floor. I look up at the ceiling. My vision is a little blurry, but I can smell my cat’s pee, so I know I’m in my house.

‘Corona is real and my life is over’. The thought keeps playing in my head, day in and day out. So just before the lockdown, I go for a haircut and to get a piercing. It helps me to feel something, to feel that I’m still in charge. I feel a weight lifted from my shoulders.



# Sello sa khutsana

by Refiloe Lebajoa

Mpho le Neo ke metsoalle e ntšanang se inong, ba lula motseng oa Ha Nthonyane Makhalaneng. Neo ke khutsana-khulu e lulang le nkhoona oa eona, ha Mpho eena a lula le batsoali ba hae; 'me bobeli ba'a sebeta. Le ha ho le joalo, ba utloana haholo ba sa khesane ka bohloki.

Hoseng hoa letsatsi le leng ka khoeli ea Phuptjane, likhoho li sa theoaha likalaneng; qhoqhoane e letse metsing, moea e le o hlabang o kenang ha bohloko masapong. Baroetsana bana ba babeli ba ea lebenkeleng motseng oa Thusong. Ho ne ho le hole haholo. Ha ba le mateanong a linoka, letsatsi le ne le otlala lithaba.

'Ichu! ka tla ka khathala, ha re phomole hanyane hle motsoalle,' ke Neo o bua joalo a itšoara mangole a phomola.

'Ache joale na re tla fihla moo re eang ha re ntse re phomola?' ho botsa Mpho.

Neo a araba, 'Ae uena o batla re mathake le ha re sa mathele sekoalong?'

'Se ke ua bua ka sekolo hle, ha se moo re tla ea hona joale. Kapa u lebetse ke nako tsa Covid-19? Ha re mathe re ea hole,' Mpho a rialo a tšeha, ebile a se a ntse a hula Neo. Neo a itsukutla ha Mpho a mohula, Neo a khoptjoa a batla a oela.

'Ae Mpho, bona hona joale ke batlile ke oela ka metsing,' Neo a bua joalo ba se ntse ba tšeha bobeli ba bona.

Ha ba qeta ho tšela, ba hloa moepanyana. Ba kopana le Ntate-moholo a tšoere lere ka letsoho le letšehali le letona a tšoere koranta.

Mpho ho Neo, 'Motsoalle ha re kope koranta ena ea Ntate-moholo re tlo ipalla eona.'

'Ebile ha a na re tseba le ho re tseba hobane re roetse limonkoana (mask),' ho araba Neo.

Hang-hang koranta ea fefohela thokoana, Mpho le Neo ba ikhapela eona ka mahahapa 'me ba baleha. Ntate-moholo a halefa hoo melomo e neng e sitoa le ho tsamaea.

'Hee lona bananyana, mpheng koranta eno eaka!' ke Ntate-moholo eo ka khalefo.

Ka nako eo Neo le Mpho ba ne ba potela ka letsoapo. Ha ba se ba potetse, ba lula fatše ba bala.

'HO TSEBISOA BAITHUTI HORE BA TLA KENA SEKOLO KA MARANG-RANG'

Mpho a tlola-tlola ke thabo, empa Neo eena a sulafalloa; a sosobanya sefahleho, a beha matsoho hlohong, likeleli tsa keketla marameng. A bua ka lentsoe le thothomelang, 'Joo! Ekaba ke tla etsa joang 'na 'mè le ntate ba ntšihile ke le khutsana, le nkhoona a se na fono ea marang-rang? Ekaba sello sa ka se tla utluoa ke mang?'

Mpho a khathala matla empa a potlaka ho mo tšelisa a re, 'Ke tla kopa batsoali ba ka ba u rekele fono. Ha ke na ho tsoelapele ka lihlopha uena ua sala. Thabo ea hau ke eaka.'

# Kokoana-hloko ea corona

by Thabo Mohloboli

Coronavirus ea le sisinya lefatše  
Ea bolaea batho joaloka liphoofole tsa naha  
Ha e khethe 'mala oa mohlobo ho benya  
E kena malapeng ohle borui le bofutsana ha e likhethe  
Bana ba likolo ea ba lebatsa libuka  
Bokamoso ba bona ba ba lerotho ho fifala  
Ea amoha litichere mesebetsi

Tlala ke ea boja-likata malapeng ka ho fapana  
Baetapele ba se sotla sechaba sa Morena Moshoeshoe  
Bobolu le bomenemene tsa ata lebitsong la corona  
Nyene le bosiu chelete ea nyamela joaloka metsi lehlatheng  
Ba iphethola lira tsa Basotho e le baetapele

Lockdown ea fihla ka pelo e bohloko  
Ea ripitlisa sechaba ka masole mali a tšoloha  
Basotho ba kena lipetlele mabaka a fokola  
Kokoana-hloko ea otlala lipelo tsa rona bohloko  
Lingaka li hlolehile lefatše ka bophara  
Bakuli ba tlala lipetlele ka bongata  
Ba 'maloa ba thola pheko, la aparela boholo ba bakuli lefu

E tšoaetsana ka mekhoa e fapaneng  
Ha motho a khohlela, a thimola kapa a buoa  
Boipaballo bo molemo ho feta setlhare,  
Hlatsoa matsoho khafetsa  
E ba motsoalle oa mask kamehla  
Ha re beng ngatana-'ngoe re loantše kokoana-hloko ea corona