

Pitika Ntuli: writer, poet, professor, friend of humanity, lover of nature. So many things in one human being! Few of us shine like him in this world of suffering and happiness, of pain and pleasure, of roses and thorns! This Pitika Ntuli, born of great parents into apartheid South Africa. As a young boy, he was not afraid of the bullet, he defied suppression and oppression, fought against the evil regime, stood up for his brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers. He bared his Soul, surrendered to the supreme divine, and was protected by the Gods, ancestors, planets, rivers and mountains. Some rare souls born on this Earth stand out, lit within, leave behind a legacy of beauty, charm, and creativity wherever they are placed.

It gives me joy, honour, and pleasure to have met such a gifted being. On a very cold London morning, I made my way to his studio. A big man in the London art world, in the exile community, and amongst writers and intellectuals - yet, so humble. I saw the artworks, work after work, created from wood, abandoned trees, bones and stones.

And then our journey began. Antoinette, a friend, sister, someone I felt I had known long before I arrived. Many exhibitions followed, poetry readings, Pitika never tired. Art flows from his very being. The ancestors always came, giving us love, and more inspiration. Antoinette despaired, even her wheelbarrow was turned into a work of art!

That Prometheus, Pitika, we could not leave him alone, he turned everything into writing or art! So now even the Gods came to stay. And soon we were surrounded by famous musicians, singers, playwrights. Our exhibitions, not displays of artworks alone, but poetry readings by Pitika and other poets, performances by musicians, ongoing artistic dialogues between artists from almost every corner of the world. A magnet for those fleeing injustice, not only in SA, but Columbia, Chile, El Salvador, Kenya, Namibia. And knowledge grew. Antoinette supported the artists with love and care. Pitika's life was fulfilled, with 3 beautiful children. And a very caring community.

The exile community and the mainstream art community loved and respected this humble artist who represented Africa in its entirety with his knowledge of words, his creativity, his love of justice and truth. Many warriors passed this way. Whose ashes are these that lie in mountains and speak of days gone by? They come from Soweto, from Sharpeville, from Nyanga, from Gugulethu. Oh Africa, great land South Africa, our Mother, tell me, who loves you enough to give their body and soul to you, risking all. Pitika's works are about his life from birth soul to soul on different lands capturing all that he has witnessed. And now he honours you, Mother Africa, your beauty, your Divinity, your special light that shimmers giving hope to young students.

Once Pitika told a wonderful story relating to his young life in South Africa. Many police had arrived and were harassing the community. He was young then and most of the men had gone to work, which left women, old people and children. What could he do? He was barely 18 years old but decided that he had to protect the community, a dangerous decision as many children and young people were being jailed, tortured, or killed. He says that at that moment he was overcome with ancestral spirits and knew that whatever happens is really meant to happen. He went into the middle of the road, facing the Caspar armoured vehicles and soon many others joined him, and strangely the police were overwhelmed by the bravery of the youth and

left. From that day he, Pitika, paid attention to all that he saw, heard, felt and he was able to hear and feel the voices from the ancestors clearly.

In South Africa there are many forms of art, some dating back to ancient times. Cave art, art on walls of homes, in front of homes - these are traditions. Each country has a tradition, a religious belief, a spiritual journey that may differ from one person to another but ultimately takes us all back to the Source of Creation. Humankind has destroyed many of our traditional beliefs through greed, through thirst for conquer and rule.

Bones are a vital part of our physical body. Bone throwing is an ancient, healing, tradition in South Africa and Africa as a whole and, together with the use of indigenous plants, this practice helps many people get relief from illness, bad luck, and demonic attacks. Unfortunately African divinity, healers, worship systems, and herbal mastery over disease have been heavily suppressed in many countries under colonial rule (probably because of the fear of their power). In South Africa, during the cruel apartheid years African spirituality and worship systems were pushed aside to give way to Christianity. However, colonialism could not totally suppress these beliefs and they still continue to exist and practised in the deep rural areas of South Africa. In fact most of African people across the continent continue to defy and resist Western practices and belief systems.

In other parts of the world, India for example, Hindus never allowed their spirituality or culture to be denigrated, or treated as inferior. In ancient times Hindus celebrated their culture with street art, body art, image worship, decoration as well as worshiping the sanctity of cattle and the natural environment including trees and rivers, and they still do so today. From the time of birth until death, the human body is seen as impermanent. As a result, ashes play a very vital role in traditional healing, and why, when a Hindu dies in India, their body is cremated - because soul never dies. And why ashes from a fire offering are collected and used on foreheads and arms, as protection. Hindus understand and share a reverence for bones!

This sculpture, this brilliant mastery of bone, is a gift to Mother Africa, and couldn't be better timed as the continent battles with the Covid-19 pandemic.

At last Now Come Throw a Bone

Bones come
Let us cross
For times are wild
Corona has arrived
Come out Sangomas
Show us the way

Bones and throwing the bone
East or west
Fall
Show me
What is to be done
Bones

A backbone
A front one
Whatever bone
Let us celebrate you
Give You our rightful place,
Oh Bone
Your power
For who knows
Which way
That bone may fall
Let it be part of destiny
The ancestors have spoken!

Pitika's powerful work will give pleasure to so many who see it and should rightfully occupy public spaces in South Africa so it can be seen by, and give joy to, our mothers, our fathers, our children.

