

empower

WOMEN'S HEALTH & EQUAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE (WHER)
BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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At Last!

We are ecstatic to be back with the second issue of our bi-annual newsletter – EMPOWER! Each day I am more grateful to be a representative of this amazing community where we work together to create an avenue for justice, equality, love, understanding and togetherness. We are hoping that our work will be a challenge to everyone to raise their voices in unity with ours as we continue on this quest for equality in a society where women are often faced with discrimination and violence.

In this century, in fact in 2016, a certain leader, whose name is not worth mentioning, while attending a press conference with the first female Chancellor of Germany, claimed that his wife's place is in his kitchen, his living room and in the "other room." Some others mock women without remorse to score cheap political points, to chain us in the kitchen, yet we rise!

In a world where women's voices seem irrelevant and weak, where

women freely expressing their sexualities is seen as taboo, we speak!

With the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, and other homophobic policies steering violence, fear, anxiety towards us, and causing us so much pain and tears, we thrive!

We bring to you our diverse voices through artwork, poems and stories. These words are our true emotions and thoughts and we have more to tell you. I hope you enjoy it!

- Akudo Oguaghamba
(Executive Director)



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UNTITLED *by Ayo Collins*

PITCH BLACK ASH

By Njabby Nyathi

Pitch black Ash.
I reach into the closet of my memory
To try and find an occasion where my skin
Pitch
Black
Was not seen as a sin
As a burden
Sodom and Gomorrah to the masses
As a disgrace
A reason to bleach
Burn
And destroy.
Pitch black Ash.

I've been everything to the world
By virtue of my skin not having had the ability
The apparent grace and class
To aspire to a whiteness that forms the basis of my self-hate.
Pitch black Ash.
You've done nothing for me
In your name I have suffered injustices that are burnt into my soul
That are ingrained into my being
That neither the mirror nor those who look straight at me and call me
ugly
Can never erase

Pitch black Ash
I've had to relearn myself that you and you alone can ever reach deeply
enough into yourself
To find the love they deprived you of
To rid yourself of a stigma you never solicited
That you didn't create
That you cannot seem to shake no matter how hard
How deep
How painful
The trembling in your core tries
Pitch black Ash.

You are neither a nightmare
Nor a curse.
You are a force.
You defy even the Phoenix that rises from the ashes
You are born of ash
You have risen through the burning of your own kind
Come out embodying the very furnace that is inherent to your being
The furnace that they have over and over and over again
Used to try and destroy you.
Tailored and beaten into a submission that you can never fall into
That was never made for you
A submission that
Against the odds, you still defy
Pitch black Ash
You are majestic

You are the Queen of Shiba
Dark-skinned medusa
Dreaded beauty with the nappy hair
Fear of the white man
The pride of my spirit
The carefree laughter of my people

Pitch black Ash I applaud you
You've stood the test of ridicule
Even from your own kind
Of hatred
Backlash that you will never fully understand
Even from me

The one who should carry you with pride
The one who should know better
And still here you stand
Reminding me that I am regal before anything else
That the goddesses of these lands gave you to me as a gift from the
sun
A reward
In the very end
For the woman I'd unfortunately have to fight to be

You are the toil of my people in the burning sun on a hot day
Never tired
A representation of strength
The survival of an entire people
Resilient
Pitch
Black
Ash.

I cannot thank you enough for how far you've brought
For raising me from my fetal position
To the bending of my knees
From crawling to becoming a runner
From submission to fighting
From complacency to revolution
Pitch black Ash.
You've saved me from myself
You've kept the darkness
My demons at bay
With your
Soft caresses
Your rough demeanor
Your cut that isn't meant for all to appreciate
Pitch black Ash.
Dreaded beauty with the nappy hair.
Pitch black Ash.
Pride of our nation
Pitch black Ash.
Pitch black Ash.
PITCH BLACK ASH.

MY STORY: A DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET IN A RUSH

By Gloria Nwigwe

It all happened as if I was dreaming. Hmmm, but unfortunately, it was reality.

My life was almost shattered in the twinkle of an eye, and I paid for it dearly.

March (2016) was a horrible month for me. I met a friend on social media, Facebook to be precise. We became close and intimate and would talk to each other on the phone almost every day. This lasted for more than a year before we decided to meet each other face to face. Little did I know, everything was fake -- the chat, the call, the female voice I was used to hearing, it was all a lie.

On that horrible day, I went to see her, picturing the description she gave me in my head. She had told me that her driver would come pick me up because she was very busy at home. With a free mind, I accepted. Upon reaching her bus stop, I saw the driver and became furious, for no reason my inner mind asked me not to go but I couldn't listen. There is a proverb that says "when a dog wants to die, it loses its sense of perceiving defecate", at that time all I wanted was to see my long awaited friend, so I followed the driver. When we got to the home, the driver asked me to wait for her in the room that she was coming. Immediately, I entered the house and saw two guys with different weapons. One had a gun and the other one had a machete. My mind flew and I became afraid. They instructed me not to shout or else they will kill me, so I

(Continued on page 8)

THAT CHOICE

By "A"

Thirteen years into my marriage, I fell in love with a woman. I am married to a good man though. He is loving (in his own special way), God fearing, kind, and loyal. He is a wonderful father to our five kids. We have a happy home together, although I am currently living in a different country.

For thirteen years, I never knew it was possible to fall in love, but for the first time I am experiencing feelings that surpass anything I have ever felt before. Her name is... let me call her "Desire". I know her from back in my university years, she's a friend and due to our closeness, she also grew to become a close family friend. Before I got married, I remember we had an intimate, special connection. I knew there was something between us, but I refused to define it and I ran away. I got married, we lived apart with little to no communication.

So, remember I am a married woman and I am supposed to be "straight", right? I am not sure a straight woman could be in love with another woman. Desire has made me question my sexuality. Can someone say exactly how it feels to be a lesbian? I've always asked myself how it could be possible to have such a deep connection and unwavering feelings for someone of the same sex? I didn't understand this kind of love until seeing her again after 13 years, it was impossible to hold myself together. I fell deeply, madly in love.

It felt so wrong the way she made me feel. It terrifies me so when I moan out loud from my sleep. And then I remember, my husband and my five kids. The shame, the fear, the courage all at the same time and then I

(Continued on page 9)

ZION

By Njabby Nyathi

My breath hitched
Stuck in my throat in the form of a shocked sob
One that I could never allow myself to release
You see
When you are a black woman
Not even your emotions belong to you
You are Zion to the nation
And Zion
Can never be seen to fall

And so I swallowed
Pushed the thought as far back as my sub-conscious
As far back as I
Could afford
Dusted the specks of sand accumulating on my dark jeans
And stood
The rustling of the leaves meant it was time to fight again
And so
That is what I did.

THICK AND BLACK

By Hadiza Selaboy

Thick and black is on my head
like an impatient Calabash soon to drop
and flow on my back like satin and silk
Thick and black I itch and scratch
all day long I feel distraught
scissors at hand to grant my wish
Thick and black it twists and turns
thick as snakes on Medusa's head
capable of striking down her foes
Thick and black my glittery gold
priceless treasure that can't be sold
Mother's gift to give my child
Thick and black it broke my comb
but shea butter I have to end my doom
my afro tresses shall grow so soft
Thick and black has turned to grey
I'm glad I lived to see this day
for thick and black I'll pass away.

WHER Activity Highlights

September
2016

Attended the 13th AWID International Forum
Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



October
2016

Attended the 59th Session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)



November
2016

Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



December
2016

International Human Rights Day Celebration & Social Networking Events
Attended ILGA World Conference



February
2017

Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



March
2017

International Women's Day Consciousness Raising Activity - Film/Discussion

April
2017

WHER Staff Retreat



Check out our upcoming events!

MY LOVE FOR YOU

By Akudo Oguaghamba

I met you when you met me
I fell in love even without knowing it
I know no other
I have no issues committing, especially when I trust
And I trusted you

I grew up with you, I never gave any other a chance
You were my everything and I celebrated you with every passion within me
I served you, I toiled for you, I fought for you
But in the end, after everything – you rejected me

Not only did you reject me, my love
You hate me, you despise me with the same level of passion that I love you
You even mobilized people to destroy me, to kill me, to rape me, to humiliate me
I am constantly hiding, in shame and fear, my tears soak my pillow

I remained with you, pleading and hoping
Hoping that one day you will see me, and smile at me
Stretching out your hand to hold me in your bosom
And tell me that everything will be okay – this is but a dream

Just a dream – I don't want to wake up
My pains know no bounds, I feel my heart jump out of my chest all the time
Not knowing what you and your followers will do next
Yet I love you, still - why, I asked

Just let me stay with you
Let me breathe the air around you, let me love you regardless
you said no, I disgust you and do not belong with you
just because I am who I am
just because of things I cannot change about me
I have prayed and fasted and wished this away
I have hated and punished myself for so long
I have tried to conform, to be who you want

My dear country Nigeria,
For I have loved you so
Yet you reach out to me, and you crushed my soul & hope
Blocking your ears to my pleas and supplications
I shall rise above, like a phoenix I shall rise again

("My Story: A Day I Will Never Forget in a Rush" continued from page 4)

closed my mouth with my hand as I was crying for help. They collected my phone worth of 400 US dollars, my jewelry, sum of N17, 000 cash, and my laptop. They also striped me naked and were snapping pictures of me, asking me to turn around for them to take nude pictures of me, and while all this was going on, I was still pleading for my life, begging them to let me go. They shut me up and asked me to call my relatives so that they can pay 300,000 for my freedom. I called a few people with the phone on speaker and to no avail I was with them for more than 3 hours! When it became dark at night, they asked me to dress up, after dressing up, they threatened to take me to police station to report to them that I am a lesbian and that I am guilty of 14 years imprisonment. I cried like I have never done before, pleaded to them to let me go and I told them the worth of my phone that they can sell it for a good price. After much pleading and crying, they told me that if I ever come back here to look for them that they will upload my nude pictures to all social media and that I was so lucky that they didn't rape me or beat the lesbian out of me, that I should thank my lucky stars that they are in good moods and for me to know that I am not the first or the tenth person that they have dealt with. So they took me back to the bus stop and left me stranded. At that time I was grateful to God that am alive to testify and to tell of the story.

My advice to all community members is to be very, very careful when dealing with people they don't know because it's high time we embrace safety and security measures for our own good. We don't have to be carried away by someone we barely know, also be careful of the people we meet through social media, some of them are fake and are like hungry lions looking for whom to devour.

WOMAN *of Influence*



SANDRA AGUEBOR

"Nigeria's First Female Car Mechanic"

Born in Benin City, Nigeria, Sandra Aguebor's passion for mechanics was alive and well at a young age. While many discouraged her from following her dreams of becoming an auto mechanic, she was not deterred, graduating from university with a degree in mechanical engineering and taking a job working at Nigeria Railway Corporation. Years of experience later, she opened her own auto-garage and founded the Lady Mechanics Initiative, an organization that teaches women from various backgrounds how to repair cars and become financially independent. Since founding LMI in 2004, more than 700 women have graduated from her program and many have gone on to open their own shops. A true inspiration to women and girls alike, Aguebor, is a shining example of what it means to never give up on your dreams.

<https://face2faceafrica.com/article/nigerias-first-lady-mechanic-sandra-aguebor>

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("That Choice" continued from page 4)

see her and the shame, the fear, and the circle of feelings just continue.

The thing about how we feel for each other is that, it isn't just sexual, we connect in so many ways. I couldn't just imagine an intimate relationship with another woman or even visualize it. With her it is fate invented. I couldn't hide my feelings anymore; I must let her know. I want to hold her, feel her and laugh with her.

"Hey, can I tell you something? I am dying inside"

"OMG! Are you okay?"

She looked at me and I died a little. I knew it was now or never, and so I told her. It killed me to find out that she is in a committed relationship with someone she loves and they live together. But what destroyed me the most was learning she loved me for years, she waited for me to see her but I was bent on doing my duties to my family, to the world and I let my angel pass me by. Now she is happy with someone else and I must live with my reality – with my husband and kids. There is no passing day I do not think of her, dream of her and wish she could hold me in her arms, just once. Even though I knew I liked women, especially Desire, I believed this feeling would go away after I got married. I made a choice 13years ago, that I must live with for the rest of my life even when my soul belongs to someone else. What am I now? Straight?

FUCK FEMEN

By Soraya



I use my body and mind as a weapon for decolonization and de-sexualization, which is a delicate matter because our bodies are so used to being exoticized. So as a response to Femen girls, I made a shoot using lipstick and my "big fat ass".

STRANGE

By Chazbee

I feel a feeling but I know not what
A longing so scares my thought
I fight a war in my heart of wither sought

I feel for the one I have but cannot HAVE
I feel the right-wrong feelings that hail
Should I, should I not sail?

For boobs and feminine hug and love I long
And I fear that my fever so high is tolled
Who will believe a girl could long for boobs and vee?
Oh my head be cool and live.

Mama will curse and toss
Friends will tense and flee but my thought thus grow
And I guess I'm stuck in scrolls
But for boobs and vee I still hunger and troll

I love the girl that's smart and fair
She looks calm, fierce, and thorough like fire
You give me chills and butterflies thus
I need your love and caress

But who will hear of this longing I have
The thought they say is sin
Making judgments for God like saints
I plead to be left in my "sin and sail"
If this feeling so sweet is wrong
Then heaven is far not what I "see"

Die not sweet thoughts
I have the girl I crave in my mind
And there I shall erect a castle befitting her queenship
If in my thought she puts to stay
I will serve her hole till she loves my world aloe.

Since this feeling I know not what!!!
The girl in my thoughts I choose to love.

WHER UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2017

Financial Empowerment
Workshop



May 2017

IDAHOT Commemoration Activity
& Consciousness Raising Activity

May 2017

Human Rights
Sensitization Forum



July 2017

Human Rights Sensitization Forum &
Community Paralegal Training
Workshop

August 2017

Peer
Counselors
Training



October 2017

African Commission on Human
and People's Rights

ISLAND

By Chazbee

My body hungers for you
My head bids for you
I dream of you all day
My heart needs the pleasure you beget
The pleasure that lingers even after you depart

I want to take you away to the Island of pleasure
You and me on the bed of the ocean
Clothed in nothing but our birth wear
Your bosom glaring at me with beckoning stares

I want to trace my finger through the ridges of your nakedness
Burry my fingers at the edge of your waterfall
Tracing my tongue from your face down to your inner forest of pleasure
Listening to your heart beat like the throng sound from the waterfall

You will beg my tongue to do more my darling
With moans announcing your approval of my hunts
Sucking in my tongue like a wild banana, we will stare at us and smile
We will feel the pleasure and giggle

With the ocean fresh breeze we will be filled
You will cause my tongue to lick through you
To the point of your utmost pleasure
Then I will bury my head in your cave of passion
That cave by now is flowing with tasty water
Licking as if I am searching for diamonds and being filled from
The sonorous song you make under your breath
Gyrating under me like I am the best beat maker

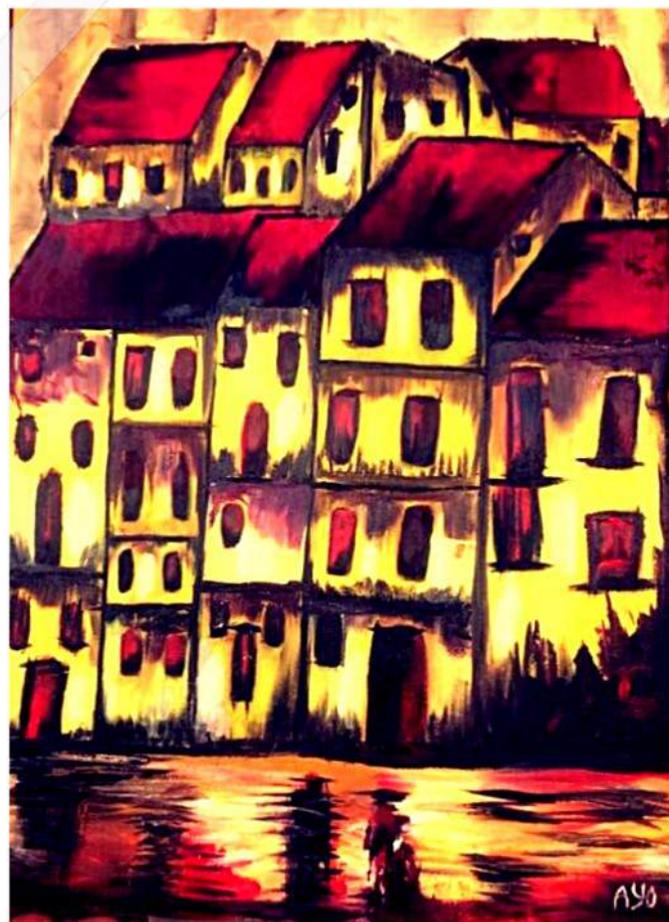
Hummmmm! Becomes both our chorus and your gyrating tempo increases
You then add to the song, the verse that I love the most
"Just like that baby", "Just like that love"..
That's the inspiration I desire
With your hand directing my head to that part of perfection

Then comes the great announcement
"I am gonna come baby, make me come for you", you say
I will nudge you to "come" cos I await your arrival
Of course that's why we are here
To make you "come" to this place we love so much
Your face, a combination of wicked gentleness
And your body as soft as a wet foam
You will whine your waist non-stop
Touching my hands and "speaking in tongues" then
With the Latino waist move your cave explodes in my face

The royal arrival to my island
The shake and waist work that follows
That is how you announce your arrival

Your island overflowing with crystal water
My mouth full and drunk, the shy look of pleasure you give me
Smiling like we just met
That look of absolute satisfaction,
I am filled with pride and joy cos I just made you mine
My pride keeps rising till you turn over and say
"Now it's your turn"

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UNTITLED WORKS by *Ayo Collins*

MY HEADSTONE READ "BELOVED DAUGHTER"

By Fikayo Balogun

It was a summer evening.
The breeze turned leaves
into jellyfishes,
then ran across the field of grass
and I crushed blades
beneath my feet
on my way to find love.

Love pulled me
by my crown,
pinned my face
to the rocky scales
of the baobab tree
and yanked my skirt away.

Ice wind rushed between my legs,
flushed
my will, my freedom
through my mouth
with every scream
of
NO!
Don't!
Please!

He slammed away
till he released his poison
inside of me.
His toxic glow
exploded through my veins
till my heart
became stone still.

Crushed berries
was my bed,
dead leaves hugged
my naked body.
I could feel
the sting
of a thousand bees
between my legs
as the earth soaked up
the slimy liquid
dripping from my core.

"You woke the sleeping dragon with your giggle, love," he said.
I wanted to scream
"Don't tell me it was my fault that your mind is a sink hole."
I came to find love,
No one warned me that men had become wolves devouring
every beating heart.

No one sent me a memo or was it lost in the mail
like my soul.

I wanted to scream, but my cords
had lost the will for words.
I watched him
zip up the murder weapon. He laughed
his laughter flew ahead of his thirsty boots
as he beat a path away
from my battered soul.

I died that summer evening
My headstone read
"Beloved daughter, she loved berries."
I was buried deep
on a wasted land
with no berry tree.
The priest said
I died an unholy death, like
it was my fault
that no one saw that
I died, long before
I became dead.

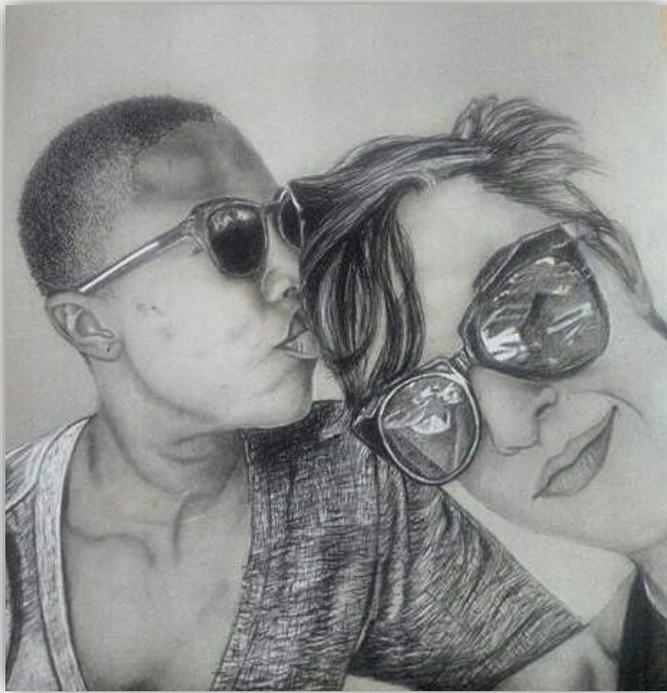
The world asked me to speak,
I said
Words are
dogs without bites,
bees without stings,
kings without crowns.
Words can't describe
the injustice
that has been dealt
to my very soul.

Words would buy you justice,
they said.
I told them, I came
from a line of novelty,
a city of
virgin maidens, frail fairies,
white hills and red mountains.
A vast land of
berries graced upon by
things
scarce and pure like
unicorns.

But what has been taken from me
is my life with my soul
ripped from its root.
I have disappeared into oblivion,
words cannot bring me back.

“CELESBIAN” FAN ART

By XtiahannaArt



Samira Wiley & Lauren Morelli



Ruby Rose

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Contributor PAGE

The Who's Who of This Issue

"A"

"A" is a 41 year old university professor. She has come to discover her sexual orientation later in life and although she is married, her heart belongs to someone special.

Akudo Oguaghamba

Akudo Oguaghamba is a Human Rights Educator and Defender. She is the founder and Executive Director of Women's Health and Equal Rights (WHER) Initiative, Nigeria. She serves on the Steering Committee of the Solidarity Alliance for Human Rights (SAHR), Nigeria, a coalition of organizations working to advance the rights and promote the well-being of LGBT and other sexual minorities in Nigeria. She is also serving on the Board of PAN-AFRICAN ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) as Co – Chair (Female). She is passionate and committed to the advancement of social justice including sexual rights and gender equality.

Ayo Collins

With a passion for art since childhood, Ayo Collins is a talented and up-incoming artist. She holds a BSC in International Relations and strives to beautify her environment and the art world in general with her work.

Chazbee

Chazbee is a budding, bisexual poet who has been writing for 15 years. She is most inspired by situational events, people, and emotions.

Chinue Igwe (Editor)

Chinue Igwe is a feminist and activist, she works at a mental health non-profit and holds a degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. She has had the pleasure and privilege of designing and editing the first and second issues of the EMPOWER newsletter.

Fikayo Balogun

Fikayo Balogun is a Nigerian poet, spoken-word artist and writer. She has performed to a varied audience at events in different locations in England, France, Togo and Nigeria, including the Croydon Hotel for the Black MUA Awards in 2014. Her passion for writing inspired her to pursue a Masters in Creative and Professional Writing from Roehampton University. She is also a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen and other writing groups. She currently resides in London and blogs at fikayobalogun.wordpress.com

Gloria Nwigwe

Born on the 29th of March, Nwigwe Gloria C. hails from Imo State. She is a Science Laboratory Technology graduate from the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, and is also a member of Nigeria's Institute of Science Laboratory Technology. She has worked with AllCO insurance company in Lagos and at a financial house in Enugu. Above all else, she is a human rights activist.

Hadiza Selaboy

Hadiza Selaboy is a 21 year old student of International Studies and Political Science in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna. She can be found at the Korean Cultural Center Nigeria mastering the art of taekwondo as a means of self defense and mental strength. Her path to becoming a feminist has been filled with like-minded women and role models from across the globe.

XtiahannaArt

XtiahannaArt is a fair complexioned, calm, peaceful, and funny person. She resides in Ibadan and attends school in Ile-Ife. A quote that she lives by is: "I'm not a failure... Always a lesson". She derives her inspirations from the way in which the world sees women as a minority who needs to be controlled and oppressed because she sees women as a strong and passionate peoples.

Our Sisters on the Continent

Njabby Nyathi

Originally from the east rand of Gauteng, South Africa in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Njabby Nyathi is a 22 year old law student studying at Stellenbosch University. These are her first published works and she credits her inspiration to what she feels most in the moment.

Soraya

Soraya is an Algerian girl living in Paris. She works as a "modele vivante" sometimes and understands the ways in which bodies are linked to politics. As a feminist, she deals with a lot of white superiority in her spaces, visions, and definitions. She fights for an inclusive and powerful space in her life and for others.