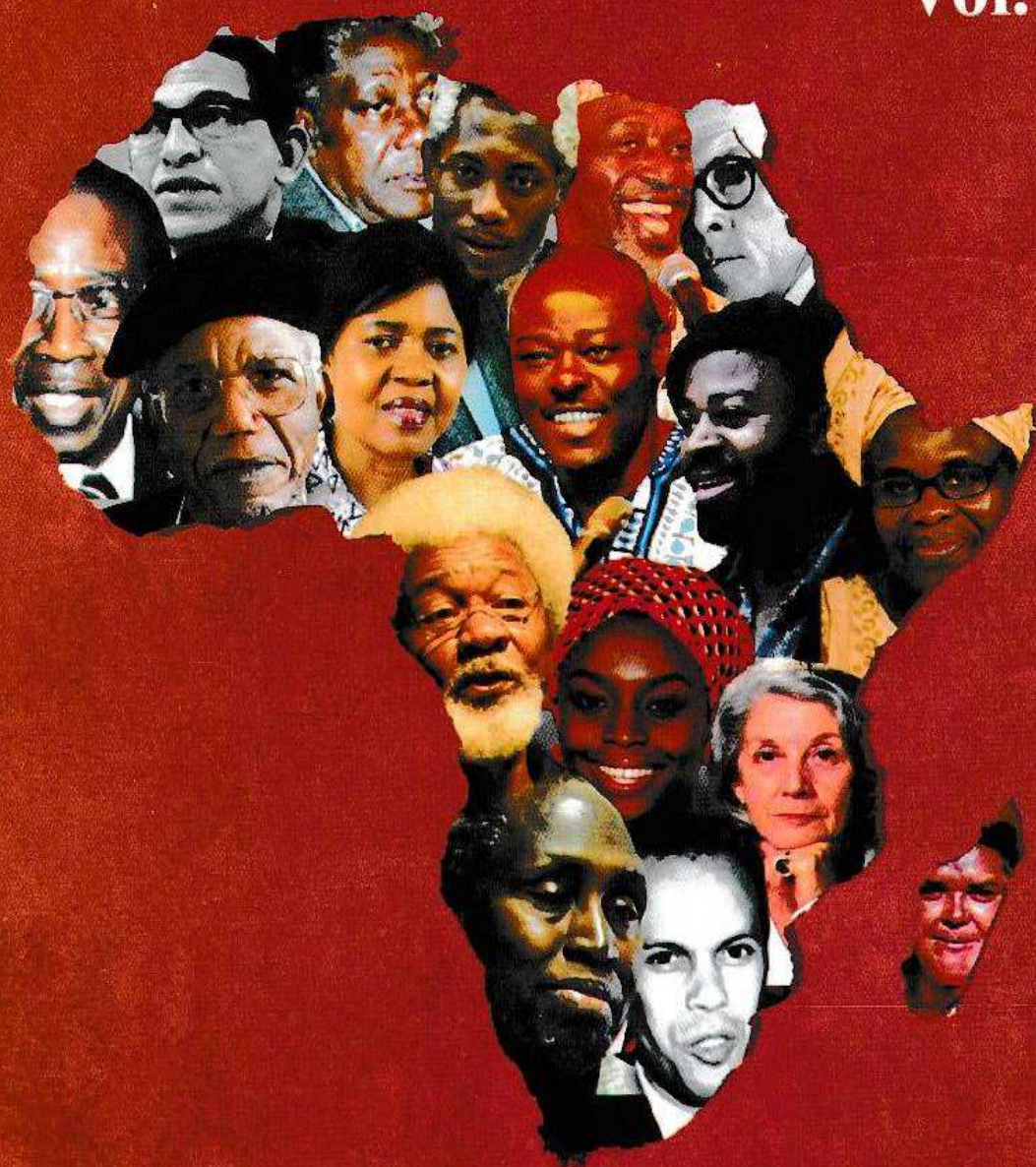


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NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

AUTHOR: JOHN KANI (1943 -)



Type of work:	Play
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Time of plot:	2002/Post-apartheid South Africa
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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Sipho Makhaya is 63 and is the Assistant Chief Librarian at Port Elizabeth Public Library. He has worked for 33 years sustaining an ambition of becoming the Chief Librarian. He has lived in incubated anger all these years against Themba, his brother who took everything that could have been his for pleasure and meaning, including his wife Sindiswa. Worse still, Themba is considered a heroic mentor by his (Sipho's) only adorable son Luvuyo. Sadly, Sipho loses Luvuyo during the apartheid struggle. He lives ever after a shattered man, hinged only on the last hope of becoming Chief Librarian after apartheid; after all, he was deserving of the position. He had been strongly recommended by Mrs. Potgieter, the former Librarian. He had paid his dues by taking part in the struggle with

scars to show for it. But Sipho is ultimately shattered when he is not appointed Chief Librarian by reason of age. He is to bury Themba who died in exile, the one he holds accountable for his most hurting pains. He is to have the humiliating experience of burying him next to his parents' graves. With heavy drag, he accepts to do it. He arranges for an undertaker, Rev. Haya for officiating, family members and everything else, only for his niece Mandisa (Themba's only child) to arrive with a little ash, a remnant of Themba's cremated remains. He is again disappointed and very angry. Provoked to his bones, Sipho after 33 years opens up to unleash the very dregs of his anger, namely that Themba slept with Sindiswa and they were both caught red handed by him on his bed. Both "lovers" left the family house for good that same day. Convinced, Mandisa heartily apologizes for her father's betraying crime. She also reports on her father's regrets and sincere love for Sipho. These revelations lighten up the gruesome weight on Sipho who comes across as one who would soon look for Sindiswa.

Mandisa Mackay is Themba's only child. She is between 23 and 25, born in London where her father was living in exile. She is a graduate of fashion design, with interest in exploring the aesthetics of African designs. She is bold, assertive, adventurous, and responsible. She is the only person to bring home her father's remains for burial to fulfill his wish. She loved her father and is very proud of him especially his efforts in the apartheid struggle. She respects Uncle Sipho but cannot permit him to cordon her into his overtly discretionary caprice. She is appalled by Thando's overbearing subservience, especially her willing glueyness to Sipho's altruistic apron strings. She finds that rather absurd. Equally unacceptable to her is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) stance against punishment to the deserving, not with the heinous crimes she listened to at the confessionals. She is nonetheless very accommodating; she quickly apologizes to her Uncle for what her late father did to him. She arranges a detour for Thando (all expenses to be borne by her), for her to ease up a little. She seems to be a major influence on Sipho's new perspective of forgiving those he ever had hurt against. However, she would need some time to adapt to the African cultural dynamics of communism, harmony, unity and reconciliation.

Thando Makhaya is the only surviving child of Sipho, about 26 and a teacher. She doubles as interpreter in the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She appears composed, intelligent, reliable, and teachable. She is an avid believer in reconciliation by all South Africans as the only sane way out of apartheid's memory. She persuades Mandisa to see the same. She loves Sipho so much to the extent of willing to accommodate him in her marriage deal with Mpho. Mpho must consider Sipho part of the marital

"responsibility" as she just cannot afford to separate from her only parents. This deep love expresses itself in absolute obedience to Sipho beyond the fringes of mature or adult liberties. Thando had mortgaged such liberties to satisfy Sipho's whims at all times. However, with the arrival of Mandisa, her eyes become freshly opened to 'realities' and independence mandatorily become hers as an adult. For once, Thando would dare want to do something – follow Mandisa to Johannesburg whether Sipho obliged it or not. She rejoices in having Mandisa as her sister. She is hospitable and self-sacrificing. She is the voice of wisdom who talks Sipho out of his *vendetta arson bid to bring down* the New Brighton Public Library; sequel to his frustrations in not being appointed Chief Librarian as desired. Her declared love for her father backed up with an oath to do so for life, and the same spurred-on declaration by Mandisa to Sipho, decolour Sipho's countenance of long borne malice, to a pleasant, new perspective (d) happy man.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL CONTENT

Nothing but the Truth is a fascinating story, well woven together in a pleasure-giving sequence, thought-provoking dialectics towards a convincing and concluding persuasion on reconciliation as the viable option for South African rainbow state. It is a drama which dramatizes sibling rivalry (Themba and Sipho), leaving both at their ends of psycho-defences, such as selective perception, selective memory, displacement and denial. While death – itself a psycho-agent – takes Themba in exile with yet dissatisfactions in his unconscious, Sipho survives to empty his defence's tank of the unconscious, selective perception, denial; and become "light" enough to continue with life.

The drama also characterizes the challenges of living or dying in exile, and how exile can alienate people from the cultural ambience making an adult like Mandisa re-learn her cultural values afresh, if her intention to understand and appreciate her environment is to yield expected results. Themba dies leaving a wish to be buried near his parents' graves, an expression of longing he always would have loved to have, but exile frustrated him.

Nothing But the Truth is a statement that the memory of apartheid will remain for a very long time with South Africans. Worse still, this memory will continue to provide the lens through which life's experiences (even in a democratic setting) are mirrored. Similarly, justice would seem denied by many who would see the reconciliation decision as grossly inadequate in commensurate terms with the weight-pangs of apartheid. But justice in reconciliation appears to be the most

rational balancing-out among all. Come to think of it, punishment of apartheid agents might have seemed as a “mirror” (?) or a “different” form of apartheid. And the Mosaic “tooth for tooth” approach cannot succeed in healing the wounds; rather it would have created fresh ones. This play does an incredible stuff of work via the scenarios through which Sipho found engulfing him because of apartheid. This is representative or metaphoric for all those who have apartheid bruises to show. For Sipho to accept to toe the line of reconciliation despite losing a son, wife, brother and positions, anybody else indeed has good examples to emulate. And this is nothing but the truth!

THE PLAY

Nothing but the Truth is set in a simple four-roomed house in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. This is the only visible setting of this play. It is Thursday evening, and Sipho dresses up in readiness to go and receive Themba’s corpse at the airport. He has arranged for an ambulance, Rev. Haya and the undertaker. Some family members have also been informed. This is the first act.

Scene Two shows the arrival of Mandisa in Sipho’s house for a heated argument over Themba’s cremated body and why the ashes had to come in a most ridiculous quantity for a great man. Sipho is uncertain about how to handle this against the usual cultural practice. He goes out to consult Rev. Haya and perhaps family members. Mandisa uses the chance of his absence to familiarize with Thando, and both folks rattle along so effortlessly on career, boyfriends, marriage and family ties, and the TRC. Thando extracts Mandisa’s interest to visit the TRC hearings, which is accomplished in Act II Scene 1. Mandisa however returns upset to nauseating limits. She gulps whisky to calm her anger-induced stomach ‘rupturings’ she is appalled by the so called “African humanity - Ubuntu” which saturates the wild anger of apartheid crimes with democratic reconciliatory generosity. Sipho returns with clearance that “ashes” could stand-in for a corpse.

Drinking is also deployed by Sipho in the same act to douse his tumultuous and monumental frustration in not being appointed Chief Librarian. The ease accompanying drinking it would appear unties Sipho’s tongue for the first time, and he unleashes all held up family secrets. The takings of his pleasures by Themba including his wife are chronicled.

The decision to raze the Public Library is vengefully muted; the play’s action which rises to its climactic crescendo however ends happily as Sipho is persuaded

by Thando and Mandisa to bury the hatchet and seek new frontiers to satisfy his ambitions. He obliges with a decision to ask the President to give him money to build the first African public library in New Brighton Township for his people and preside over it in a self-fulfilling determinism as Mr. Sipho Makhaya, Chief Librarian of the African Public Library in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

And the play ends in laughter, after all, by all!

Effiong Johnson