



LET'S COOK

In the inaugural issue of *The Classic* in 1963, Nat Nakasa dedicated a significant amount of his editorial comment to apologising to the readers. "The problems which beset most publications of this type are many and not easy to solve. Instead of listing them here, I wish to apologise to all those who have awaited *The Classic* faithfully. Everything will be done to avoid similar delays in the appearance of the coming issues."

Similarly, I feel compelled to apologise to the readers of *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*. When we made the public call for submissions in December 2020, we announced that the first issue will be published in May/June 2021. We were oblivious of how hungry the community of readers and writers was for such a platform. We were soon inundated with a flurry of submissions from all over the continent and had to parry enquiries where enthusiastic readers were enquiring about the publication of the journal. They could not wait to see *Imbiza* in print.

Although we made a public call only for short stories, the entries we received cut across different forms of writing, from poetry to essays, memoirs to drama, and anything in-between. Mindful of our limited capacity, as a way of managing the inflow of submissions we had commissioned many of the articles in advance. Submissions came from all corners of South Africa and other countries on the continent like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as other parts of the world, including the United States, UK, Mexico and India.

The idea for the establishment of *Imbiza* was conceived out of the luxury of time for reflection afforded by the nationwide lockdown in South Africa. In the midst of all the despair and despondence occasioned by the advent of Covid-19 pandemic, we still dreamed and persevered in pursuit of those dreams. I approached a number of individuals whom I believed could help in the realisation of this dream.

They all agreed to serve on the board and lend their intellectual capacity, inspired by the conviction that *Imbiza* is a journal whose time had come.

We envisioned *Imbiza Journal for African Writing* as an inclusive publishing platform for creative writing, criticism, academic writing and intellectual engagement for African thinkers, cultural workers and activists. Key amongst our priorities was to create a common publishing platform for aspiring writers and emerging scholars to publish alongside seasoned practitioners in their respective fields. *Imbiza* will actively promote reading, for without readers writing would become a forlorn exercise. This makes forming partnerships with educational institutions as well as entities that cherish similar ideals essential for our growth and existence.

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In isiXhosa language, the word “imbiza” means a pot used for cooking food. When we think of *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*, we imagine a three-legged pot that has been part of the lives of generations of Africans. In isiZulu, imbiza refers to natural herbs or any mixture of roots, bulbs and leaves used for medicinal purposes. It is both the sense of healing and nourishment that Imbiza espouse to bring to African readers and writers.

In our lead feature, Fred Khumalo rightfully observes that *Staffrider*, where his literary work was first published, launched the careers of many writers. The same can be said about its predecessors like *Zonk* and *Drum* magazines, as well as modern successors like *Chimurenga*, *Wordsetc*, *Baobab*, *Brittle Paper*, *Johannesburg Review of Books* and many others. Throughout history, journals and magazines have always offered a convenient publishing platform for writers to practice their craft, hone their skills and share their artistry with audiences. This is the kind of value Imbiza would like to add to the writing community.

We are inspired by individuals, organisations and associations that started journals and offered publishing platforms for writers before us. We also learn from their triumphs and failures, while at the same time adopting new methods offered by modern inventions. The journal's unique contribution to knowledge creation is its inclusivity, wherein it becomes a point of convergence for both the creative and the critical aspects of cultural production.

Khumalo is in many ways the embodiment of what *Imbiza* aspires to become. He is both a creator and a critic; straddles the literary and journalism realms; and writes in English and his native Zulu language. These are some of the elements that are palpable in this edition, which, although published mainly in English, features work in indigenous African languages such as Kiswahili, Xhosa, Zulu, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Kikuyu. The writings featured in this edition illustrate that we are all connected through our stories, histories and cultures, while at the same time emphasising the uniqueness of our individual traits, voices and experiences.

The youngest writer featured in this edition is Stacey Fru, who at the tender age of thirteen, has already published no less than five books. Fru's story invites us to get into the mind of a child not only to understand a child's psychology, but to also revisit, reimagine and reflect on our own childhoods. Fru represents our futuristic approach and the dynamism that characterises *Imbiza*. She appears in this issue alongside seasoned writer, academic, multidisciplinary artist and intellectual extraordinaire, Zakes Mda, who

is about sixty years her senior.

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To return to Nakasa, he continues to say, “It will be the job of *The Classic* to seek African writing of merit.” The same can be said about Imbiza and this is reflected in the content of our first issue. The stories in this edition represent the preoccupations, sentiments and imagination of the authors. Their contributions are as diverse as different ingredients boiling in the same pot. Ours is to ensure that the meal is fully cooked and serve it to readers. It is my greatest pleasure to present this maiden issue of *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*.

Enjoy this feast.

Siphiwo Mahala, PhD
Editor