

Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up

**THOMAS A EDISON**  
American inventor and businessman



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**ZOLANI MAHOLA TO HOST FUNDRAISER ON JOOX FOR STRUGGLING ARTISTS**

Lead singer of the internationally acclaimed South African band Freshlyground Zolani Mahola has partnered music streaming services JOOX to help raise funds for struggling artists during the lockdown. | See more on IOL

**M**  
METRO

PEOPLE

# Moms carried by job passion

*Metro officer will be away from her family today*

**LETHU NXUMALO**  
lethu.nxumalo@iol.co.za

**SUPERMOMS** who have been on the front line since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic said passion for their jobs had sustained them during difficult, demanding times.

However, after a long day at work, it was heartbreaking for them when they could not hug and kiss their children, or receive physical affection from them, at their door steps.

Metro police Captain Hlobisile Madonsela will be away from her family this Mother's Day, catching the "bad guys" and attending to those who fail comply with lockdown regulations.

Madonsela, who has been in the service for 13 years, said she would only get to spend time with her two children once the business of the day had been taken care of.

"Last year, my youngest tried to make a cake for me and my eldest prepared food for all of us," she said.

Madonsela said even though her job proved to be dangerous during each mission, it had been her passion since childhood. Her recent promotion to the Legal and Case Law Management department, requires her to handle complaints against fellow metro police officers.

"The way I was trained made me

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Last year, my youngest child tried to make a cake for me

Hlobisile Madonsela  
METRO POLICE OFFICER

love my job more, and I understand and know why and when to use my weapon," she said.

Madonsela said the difficulty faced by metro police on the ground was non-compliance with lockdown regulations by the public.

The attitudes of some residents were putting everyone at risk.

"When you wake up you don't know if you will come back from work with the virus but you can only try to keep yourself protected," she said. Doctor Nomzamo Khuzwayo, clinical manager at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban, said her two children had come to understand she had to be away from them daily, to be at the hospital to save lives.

Khuzwayo said it pained her to leave them behind especially because they still needed assistance with using electronic devices when doing

their online work. But she looked forward to coming back home and spending time with them.

"The uncertainty of not knowing, every day, what will happen there (hospital) brings fear," she said.

"There is anxiety and sometimes it's emotionally, mentally and physically draining, but in our hospitals we have psychological support provided to all staff."

Khuzwayo said although she did not attend to patients daily, her job required her to attend many meetings where management devised strategies and put systems in place. They needed to ensure that they were ready for Covid-19 cases by preparing staff through various training programmes.

"My working hours are not hectic but with the pandemic, everyone is expected to do clinical work."

"As President Cyril Ramaphosa said, we must prepare for the worst and when that time comes no one will be sitting in their offices wearing a manager's hat; everyone will be on the ground doing the work," she said.

Khuzwayo said she was looking forward to spending Mother's Day with her family at home, and urged the public to be considerate of others by taking care of themselves and adhering to the level 4 restrictions.



METRO police Captain Hlobisile Madonsela only gets to spend time with her two children after work.

CLASSES

## Teen Geeks run virtual school

STAFF REPORTER

**AFRICA Teen Geeks**, in partnership with the Sasol Foundation and supported by the Department of Basic Education, have started a school for learners called the Free STEM Lockdown Digital School.

The school's virtual classes, catering to learners in grades R to 12, commenced the 4th day of the national lockdown.

In addition, Africa Teen Geeks, an NPO, and Wits University are offering career guidance sessions for learners in grades 11 and 12 who are preparing for their undergraduate degree applications.

The sessions began on May 6 and will run for three weeks. In phase two, Grade 9s will be offered advice.

The STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) digital school will continue to provide world-class lessons for learners in grades R to 12.

The e-school has reached a total of 137 672 learners countrywide.

Parents and learners are encouraged to subscribe to Africa Teen Geeks' weekly newsletter via <https://registrations.africateengeeks.co.za> in order to receive a weekly timetable and links to access the virtual classes.

Those who are experiencing any difficulties in joining the classes on Zoom, can email queries@[africateengeeks.co.za](mailto:africateengeeks.co.za)

# An intertextual conversation

Don Makatle

IN LITERARY circles, John Maxwell Coetzee, widely known as JM Coetzee, is a demi-god. His peers and readers worship the ground he walks on.

When his book *Disgrace* hit the shelves in 1999, a literary wonder was unleashed. The novel won him the coveted Booker Prize and four years after its publication, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is difficult to find a reader who has not paged through *Disgrace*. It has achieved the legend of classics like the works of Dickens, Shakespeare and Achebe. Coetzee could do no wrong, that is until local writer Fiona Snyckers sat down to pen her own *Lacuna*, a response to *Disgrace*.

This is a rarity in literature. Snyckers says: "The choices made by the character Lucy Lurie in *Disgrace* seemed to me to call out for an explanation. Lucy is a woman who has been gang raped. She refuses to name her attackers and invites them, along with other members of the community they belong to, to join her in farming her land."

This is clearly intended to be an allegory for the decolonial process, whereby white people have had to learn to share South Africa with the black people they previously oppressed. But the allegory is unsuccessful, in my opinion. White people have never been metaphorically 'gang-raped' either during or after the handover of power. By every possible metric, white people are more prosperous today than they ever were under apartheid. I also object to the use of the rape of a woman as a metaphor for a just, necessary, and long overdue handover of power. Coetzee's character, Lucy Lurie, reacts in a highly improbable manner to her attack. I was interested in exploring how a young woman might really react to such an assault."

**Do you anticipate that a reader, like me, would want to return to *Disgrace* as he reads *Lacuna* to 'compare notes' or those who have not touched Coetzee would be encouraged to do so? Are you not inadvertently drawing readers to Coetzee?**

"It is not necessary to have read *Disgrace* in order to understand and appreciate *Lacuna*. However, many readers have chosen to revisit *Disgrace*, or indeed to read it for the first time in response to *Lacuna*. I hope that more will do so. Coetzee is one of our greatest living writers and his book is a colossus. It is massively important

and influential in South African literature. My book and his book are having an intertextual conversation, so I encourage people to read it," she says. Snyckers is coming into her own. She is the author of six previous books.

**I notice that you refer to him as John, not JM Coetzee. Is this deliberate?**

Everybody who reads him obsequiously refers to him as JM Coetzee.

"Yes, it is. My character, John Coetzee, is not the real-life author JM Coetzee. My John Coetzee is a fictional character who has only ever written one book. JM Coetzee himself has used the name "John Coetzee" as a character in his own fiction. My John Coetzee is a nod to that."

Light-bulb moment! I tell Snyckers that I know so much about JM Coetzee that I find myself studying *Lacuna* to see if the hermit I've read about will come through.

**How much of your book is fact, how much is fiction?**

I find that I have to read a lot of it twice, wading through the faction (fiction based on fact).

She says: "My entire book is fiction – loosely based on some known biographical elements of JM Coetzee's life. The Lucy Lurie of *Lacuna* is not the same person as the Lucy Lurie of *Disgrace*. I play intertextual games in the book and experiment with the unreliable narrator technique. The reader is supposed to feel confused at times, and indeed unsafe."

***Lacuna* is somewhat a documentary on the life of a rape survivor. Did you pen it with the expectation that women who have suffered such abuse could see themselves in the book and heal, or re-hurt?**

"In conducting research for this book, I discovered that there are as many different rape-survivor stories as there are rape survivors. There is no single narrative that encompasses everyone. This is a very individual story about a particular woman who is frequently unlikable. The feedback I have received from women who have survived sexual assault is that they were traumatised by *Disgrace* but found healing in *Lacuna*. Obviously that will not be the experience of all readers, but I found it encouraging."

The book could also be the subject of many literary fiction classes. It is written by a writer's writer who says she did not study Creative Writing, the fashionable launch pad of many writers



Humanities Awards 2020 Best Fiction Novel winner Fiona Snyckers and chair judge Prof Nhlaniha Maahe

these days: "I wish I had, but I never did. I studied English literature at university, but unfortunately never took a creative writing class."

In *Lacuna*, Lucy speaks to Moira 'in her mind and not with her mouth'. She 'sees' things and when you read further you realise the event did not happen; it was actually a figment of her imagination.

**"I am already happy with the acknowledgement and critical reception that *Lacuna* has received. I was absolutely delighted to receive the NIHSS award for best novel. Anything beyond that would just be icing on the cake."**

For example, she goes to Adelaide to confront John Coetzee, when she is in fact too poor to afford an Uber around Cape Town. This makes people, the therapist included, think that the rape did not really happen.

**Why make her such a dreamer, I enquire of the author?**

"One of the biggest challenges that rape survivors face is not being believed and having their credibility constantly questioned. I wanted to challenge that preconception further by mak-

ing Lucy a profoundly unreliable narrator. She does not fit the box of "rational believability" that society tries to impose on rape survivors."

**One cannot help but fall in love with the beautiful mind of Fiona Snyckers. Is she not curious though to know what Coetzee - the eminent writer, would make of *Lacuna*?**

She says: "I admire Coetzee and his work, but I am not a fanatic. He has never, as far as I know, acknowledged *Lacuna*. I don't have a problem with that. My book engages with his book, rather than with Coetzee himself."

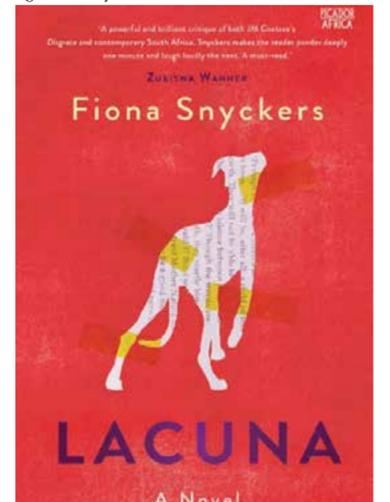
*Disgrace* has garnered a myriad awards – the best English novel in 25 years, at some point. It was made into the movie starring John Malkovich (2008).

**What would make you happy with *Lacuna*?**

"I am already happy with the acknowledgement and critical reception that *Lacuna* has received. I was absolutely delighted to receive the NIHSS award for best novel. Anything beyond that would just be icing on the cake."

"For the first time ever, I am entitled to call myself an award-winning author, which feels fantastic! I will never forget the moment when my name was read out as the winner in the Best Novel category. I was surprised and thrilled. I honestly didn't expect to win because it was

such a strong shortlist. This has been the highlight of the year for me."



*Lacuna* was crowned Humanities Awards 2020 Best Fiction Novel winner