

The cover features a stylized illustration. At the top, two hands in a light tan color reach towards each other, their fingers just inches apart. Below this, the title is centered in a bold, dark brown font. Underneath the title, the subtitle is centered in a smaller, dark brown font. The bottom half of the cover is dominated by a teal river that flows from the bottom towards a waterfall in the distance. The waterfall is depicted with a series of vertical lines, and the surrounding landscape is rendered in various shades of brown and tan, suggesting a canyon or gorge. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

A POETIC ZAMBEZI EXPERIENCE

AN ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS
Volume 1

*By Youth For Innovation Trust and
Wordsmash Poetry Movement*

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FOREWORD

The inaugural Zambezi Meetup Residency marked an important milestone in fostering cross-border creative exchange, bringing together young women artists from Zimbabwe and Zambia to share stories, deepen artistic practice, and build solidarity across cultures and communities. As reflected in this anthology, the residency created a space for reflection, collaboration, and expression around identity, belonging, social justice, and the shared experiences of life along the Zambezi. This body of work stands as a testament to the power of art to connect, heal, and imagine new possibilities.

The inaugural Zambezi Meetup Residency was more than a gathering of artists; it was a meeting of histories, languages, memories, and futures. Through poetry, conversation, shared travel, and cultural exchange, the residency created a space where young women from Zimbabwe and Zambia could encounter one another not as strangers across a border, but as creative sisters connected by the rhythms of the Zambezi and the realities of our shared region. This anthology carries those encounters forward. Each poem reflects not only individual talent, but also the collective spirit of the residency: a spirit of curiosity, courage, healing, and imagination.

What emerges from this body of work is a powerful reminder that art is not separate from social life; it is one of the ways we make meaning of it. The poems gathered here speak to identity, memory, injustice, joy, womanhood, belonging, and the enduring desire for freedom and connection. They remind us that creative expression can hold pain and possibility at once, and that when young women are given room to create, they do not only tell stories; they shape new ways of seeing the world.

As this anthology travels beyond the residency, may it stand as both an archive and an invitation: an archive of a first encounter that opened space for reflection and solidarity, and an invitation for continued collaboration across borders, disciplines, and communities. The Zambezi Meetup Residency may have been inaugural, but its meanings do not end here. They live on in these poems, in the relationships formed, and in the continued commitment to using art as a bridge between people, places, and possibilities.

Enala Ngala

Enala Ngala is a poet and an activist whose work explores social justice, civic awareness, climate issues, and the complexities of human relationships. Through thoughtful and reflective writing, she engages audiences in conversations about identity, accountability, and social change. Her poetry blends personal insight with broader societal themes, using art as a tool for advocacy and public dialogue. Enala is committed to creating meaningful impact through her voice, contributing to conversations that inspire awareness, critical thinking, and lasting transformation.



Before the Borders

So we can be African again,
return into the old days
be one village.

share the same salt the same thoughts,
trade on our land like
before it was broken into borders.

So the Nzou can wed the Ng'andu.
Let Shumba guard Mhofu. And Make
bloodlines, like rivers,
intertwined with the land
that births flowers instead of walls

Without looking like we play victims of
poverty.
Without aid pretending to rescue
when we funded the rich.
We own our land

We will not offer you chicken
when you bring bare hands.
Reciprocity is not a bitch.

We will learn to live with our demons.

It is one hell of a scar
but scars heal
when we lift our heads up.
Because the ancestors
left us with direction
written in our blood.
So when we forget who we are,
we do not have to look up
we only have to feel.
Because we are African.

Meet Me Where I Am

Respect and coexistence have a name
it simply means meet me where I am.

Not beneath you,
where you might peep into my skirt
and my only defense
would be a sandal to your head.

Respect looks like
holding your spit as you walk beside me
because carelessness
can turn an Elephant spiteful.
So don't step on my feet.
I am a cat.
I will make a fuss
and purr only when I choose.
You cannot walk past where I stand.
I am not a ghost.
Costly.
Heart tightly coiled.

Meet were I am or don't meet me at all



Contours of Legacy

African color is a representation of
spirituality on a canvas.
Its colors are conceptions of a woman
walking through the greens,
perception only your eyes understand,
a definition of abstract,
a reflection of boldness.
We own our contoured big lips, pointed
cheeks – authentic.
The only thing we can fabricate is our
chitenge.
Truth can't be erased,
Vazoonna stinga fute panali-panali.
We sit on the ground and pass it
from generation to generation.
Because a woman is land –
she carries seed,
breaks for rain,
opens to the sun,
and still grows forests
from what was planted in her.



They Told Us to Pray for Heaven

They told us to pray for heaven
while they built theirs here –
brick by brick,
on the backs of our belief.

They promised us salvation,
but stole our liberation.
They called our gods demons,
and their own God divine.
They burned our shrines,
then built churches on the ashes –
and told us it was holy.

They said, “Close your eyes and pray,”
and when we opened them,
our land was gone,
our names changed,
our tongues baptized in foreign speech.

Africa,
you were never cursed –
you were convinced.
Convinced that your ways were wrong,
that wisdom must come in English,
that the ancestors were myths,
and miracles came from the West.

You were the richest,
you are the richest –
yet they stole your wealth
and declared you poor.
They build their empires
from the gold beneath your feet,
sell your diamonds in their markets,
and call it innovation
they called it primitive.

Now we wear crosses of comfort,
forgetting they were once chains.

But they told us to pray for heaven,
when heaven was always here –
in our soil,
our songs,
our spirit.

So rise, Africa.
Not in rebellion – in remembrance.
Because freedom starts
the day you stop apologizing
for knowing who you are.

Nothing Was Wrong With You

Nothing is wrong with you.
You were just born in Africa.
And no – Africa is not the problem.
The problem is being born in a continent still leaking.
Leaking blood.
Leaking history.
Carrying weight upon unhealed traumas –
weight passed down like surnames,
trauma with a last name.
Leaking survival into culture
until endurance begins to look like identity.
And no, it is not your fault
that you don't know yourself.
Distraction was necessary.
You must not know yourself –
because knowing yourself draws a line
between what belongs to you
and what was taken.
Nothing is wrong with you.
We are walking projections.
That backstabbing, jealous friend whispering behind you,
saying your confidence is just too much,
spills her bitterness like sips through every word,
spilling like smoke into your chest,
scratching under your skin –
but it is not yours.
She is terrified of the fire
she refuses to feed herself.
It is just projection.
When you feel hurt, that's your body calling you back to yourself,
because nothing was wrong with you.

Phathisankosi 'Starlight' Moyo

Phathisankosi 'Starlight' Moyo is a Creative Entrepreneur and Climate Justice Activist dedicated to empowering young people to leverage their skills in advocating for their rights and creating a livelihood where they feel safe and heard. With passion in advancing children's rights, she also champions for Climate education in communities and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) education and meaningful youth engagement. As a Spoken Word Artist and mentee at WeCre8te Afrika, Starlight has been on national platforms where she advocated for climate Justice, social justice and political liberation. Further driving positive change and mobilizing young people to take up space. She is also a fashion designer who prioritizes sustainable practices in the fashion industry. She aims to inspire a new generation of leaders to prioritize environmental stewardship, political expression and social justice through creative expression.



Joy

I have experienced joy in the silliest of moments,
In the unplanned interactions that I end up wishing for them to last longer,
The conversations that pop up unannounced,
Evoking emotions that inspire me to write more love letters,
To places that I have been to that claimed my heart.
Though I always remind myself that I belong to another,
But these places have me promiscuous,
Going against my beliefs,
Placing aside everything I ever defined as morals.
These culture shocks that have me on my knees,
Drooling over what I have never seen before,
It's all new and enticing.
I've experienced joy in eating what I've never ate before,
Bowing down to a chief I've never met before,
Learning what it means to be a woman in a different country,
How to say hello in a language not of my own
Without feeling I betrayed my own people
I've experienced joy before,
And I would do anything to experience it again.

Peace

I saw a monkey today,
Somehow it brought back memories of my late grandmother,
Every folktale she ever told with intention,
The stories she narrated,
Until your mind started to create images,
Of what you had never seen,
I began to wonder if the monkey was a descendant,
Of the tribe that failed to work in the fields,
And create a livelihood,
I wondered if that trait of cunningness was passed down to the other generations of those monkeys,
I began to wonder,
If they are one big tribe separated by borders,
But all speaking the same language,
I began to imagine if Africa is a descendant of one person,
Who procreated generations that speak different languages,
But all drawn towards each other,
I began to wonder if one day,
These borders would soon be consumed by our love,
And we would become a united Africa,
And preserve the land our ancestors gifted to us.



Starring

Some day you'll turn on the TV only to be met by your face,
Except it will be the opposite of what you dreamed of,
You'll still be the artist,
But the art would've slowly separated itself from you,
You'll feel the distance between yourself and your creation,
You'll be the epitome of what it means to be an artist and struggling,
You'll knock on doors with no handles for them to be opened,
They'll reject your applications before they even open them,
But on the verge of giving up you will remember why you started,
It was never about you but the art,
What it offered to its audience,
Healing, restoration, safety,
So you will create more.



The missing piece

Snake bites a man,
Man kills a snake,
Man throws stones at a monkey,
Monkey snatches man's phone,
Elephant kills a man,
Man cannot reconstruct his fractured bones,
And perfectly paste his skin,
Without leaving fragments of his flesh on the soil,
Man cannot breathe air into his lungs,
Man cannot resurrect and retaliate,
Man passes along the conflict that gets adopted by his descendants.
It's a cycle that never ends
That we constantly paint with a countless justifications.
But when our ancestors call us by our names,
Will they be able to recognize the faces that respond,
Will they warmly call us their own,
Or we have become foreign to our own bloodline.
I know it's hard
To try to maintain a balance,
Between being modern but not too sophisticated,
To be told not to be too African but also not too western,
In the process shrinking ourselves,
To something smaller than the rock in between our lungs,
That we use for pumping blood,
And coming up with standards that we fail to comply to.

Black Boys raised in cages

When they ask you why you chose to stay;
Tell them in your father's house there's
plenty room to hide in,
You won't have to crawl under your bed,
Where you'll risk coming face to face,
With a monster you occasionally call my
father,
You won't have to run back to the same
closet,
You fought hard to come out of,
There's free will here,
As long as you understand that this is a
sequel of the original sin,
We are descendants of those who were
raised,
In-the-hands of a genocide,
Those that were caught up in a moment of
madness.
We carry that trauma, it's embedded on our
skin,
Always reminding us that the closest we
have left
To guardians are spiritual parents,
Who do not know how to console our
grieving hearts,
Without opening scripture,
And the verses are choking us,
They are drawing air out of lungs,
We struggle to breathe
We see everything in reverse,
We have been made to carry our own
crosses,
Persecuted for running our mouths,
There isn't a resurrection for our stolen
votes.
Yet there's free will here,
You just have to learn how to speak their
language,
So when they kick open your door
You know wasungwa means you have no
rights,
Wasungwa means you won't even make it to
court,
I will hold you by your belt,
Carry you across the city,

And slap you so hard producing an echo
that will override your screams,
Until they become inaudible,
Until you remember your tongue is only
meant to sing praises.

There is free will here
A free ride to a pilgrimage,
To partition for souls.
Get off the carriage of hope,
It has imprisoned your dreams for far too
long,
And corkscrewed your ideas until rendered
worthless.
This is the season to be enticed,
By tactics disguised as manifestos.
There's free will here so we stay,
Because soldiers in exile get spoken of,
When drafting their obituaries,
Written in code word,
That translate to treason,
So tell them if they run,
They should not look back,
They should watch their identity get stolen,
The last thing they have left,
Reminding them of who they are,
And we will stay,
Until hope becomes more than just a
slogan,
And our sorrows cease to be the new
anthem.



The rich boy

Maybe not all of them,
But that particular rich boy,
Who will make you withhold,
That the only rich associated with your name
is your mentality,
That you don't really have a size for a belt,
Because you developed a waistline of hope,
Your body eventually got used to being put
to sleep,
By it's rumbling tummy that turned into a
lullaby,
That it still doesn't know the difference,
Between cuisines and multi course meal
dining experiences,
That they are both foreign entities,
Because all that is not important
When laws of physics agree that opposites
attract,
More than anything you will want them to
attract.
To experience a world where marriage is not
just a union,
But merging of families,
And emerging of longer legacies.
Where hypocrites chant slogans that the
voice of the people
Is the voice of God,
Knowing outside their cocoon it's selectively
divine.

That particular rich boy,
Who's surname holds weight,
Because they were mandated to place aside
morals,
When they accumulated their generational
wealth,
With forefathers who were brave enough to
lay the foundation,
And parents smart enough to sustain the
legacy.
You will forget about your surname,
That only carries weight on your mother's
tongue,
Because she adopted battles so heavy,
That you feel the weight on her shoulders,
Each time she brings it in for a hug,
Your last name is not the kind to remember,

But his?
You will remember it,
It will torment you,
Until you aspire to speak their language,
Of building million dollar pools,
When you don't even know how to swim,
And adopting their mentalities of,
That hospitals have everything they need,
Patients are just being dramatic
And doctors need to be more patriotic
It's what pays their rent.
You will begin to see life from the lenses of
them that grew up with everything,
And enjoy their view of the sky,
With eyes that seldom land at the bottom of
balconies,
In palaces whose foundations were laid on
your broken dreams.
It won't matter because you'll realize,
It was never about that one particular rich
boy,
It was about how deep his pockets were
willing,
To immerse you in them with no questions
asks,
And more than anything you loved it there.



Muuka Mwendalubi Siatwiko

Muuka Mwendalubi Siatwiko, 18, is an emerging Zambian leader and creative. She completed her secondary education in 2024 and was active in the Press Club. After graduation, she volunteered as a radio presenter at Radio Mazabuka and represented Zambia at the African Children’s Parliamentary Forum in Morocco. A budding poet fluent in Tonga and English, Muuka uses her art to inspire audiences and is building her voice as a young advocate with growing international exposure.



A CELEBRATION OF HUMANITY

Obstacle after obstacle
We claimed back our story
With the confidence in our numbers,
All the languages of the Zambezi,
We claimed back our story

Our story is not one of tears nor of fears
It is the proud roar
Of the MOSI-OA-TUNYA

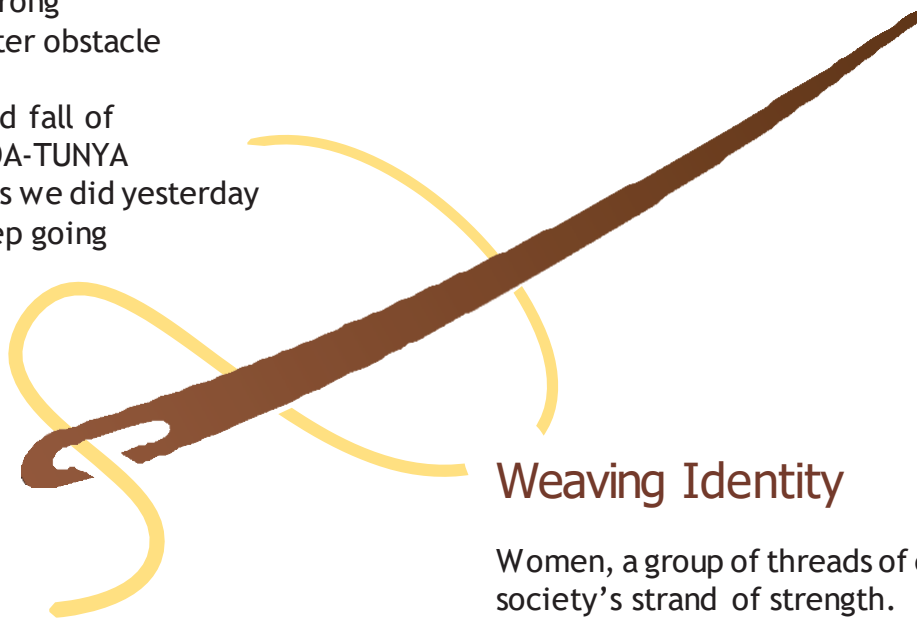
We stand tall
We stand strong
Obstacle after obstacle

As the proud fall of
The MOSI-OA-TUNYA
and today as we did yesterday
We will keep going

From the page, to the stage
We're held in care
We are BANTU BOMWE

From the memory of home,
In the texture of sadza
To the laughter sitting proud
In a shared joke, we remember
We are BANTU BOMWE

From Zimbabwe to Zambia
From Zambia to Zimbabwe
We are BANTU BOMWE



Weaving Identity

Women, a group of threads of culture, the society's strand of strength.

They weave the fabric and stories unfold.
In villages echoed, where traditions told,
Their hands weave patterns, love does abide.

Sisterhood binds, where love ignites.
Igniting love across cultures, borders, and
languages spoken...

United they stand, hearts unbroken.

As Diane Mariechild said, "A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform."

A woman's hands, a child's first home,
In African villages, love's the heartbeat's tone.

From sunrise fires to moonlit tales,
A woman's stories shape hearts, her love prevails, weaving love, shaping lives.

TULI BANTU BOMWE

We share the Zambezi,
It's waters
Is the balance of our lives

From the cross boarder trading,
To the crossing of the borders
We are BANTU BOMWE

Different languages combine
To form one
We listen
With joy as they intertwine on radio
We are BANTU BOMWE

From galleries to the studios

Artistic Pulse

Youth, youth, youth, art shouts in every creative mind,
Bringing youths together, passions intertwined.

Splattered colors ignite the night,
Colors blend on youthful canvases bright,
Dreams take shape in strokes of morning light.
Art whispers freedom, beats the creative soul,
Youthful hearts unite, vibes make control.

Brushes sway to beats of the heart,
Creativity flows, a work of art.
Voices echo, a vibrant choir,
Artistic pulse, a never-ending fire.

A spark ignites, a sneeze of relief,
Artistic pulse, a pressure to express, to breathe.
Youth pauses, takes a breath, and lets it unfold,
A moment's pause, a story to be told.



Cebo Ncube

Noma”Cebo Ncube “ is a creative whose work encompasses the arts of poetry, acting, modeling and writing. She has staged at various programs and stages including the I wear my culture show in 2025, poetry power sessions, human right movements from various NGOs and also a qualifier for the World Championships Of Performance arts. She believes in the power of creative work in Human Rights and seeks to use her talents in the cause and beyond



Songs in the breeze

We slept in the embrace of good dreams
last night,
To the sound of girls laughing
As we sang to Taylor swift
Screaming shake it off.

We work up to a world in ruins this morning
News of earthquakes that shake up the
foundation of your house.
Look up. see all the cracks to your wall,
Broken ceilings
Shards of broken glass litter your floor,
Dealing bleed wounds to your bare feet
you know something bad happened while
you slept.

Shivers of fear tremor through your heart,
you're too scared to move,
To leave the room,
to see the damage.

To accept the fact that you're homeless now,
There is no escaping this darkness,
These ruins of greed
There is no escaping this falsehood of
freedom,

You can not escape the tremors of earth,
When the plates deep below start to
tremble.

Yet in this house you stand to die,
So you know you must stand
Shake you may
But you can not break,
So you will stand,
You choose to stand
And to never be silenced

Earth's tremors

There is a breeze in the winds
That whispers in different tongues
Here,
Stories I hear,
Told in different tongues
Different songs sang
In different tunes

I feel it,
In the air caressing me,
I hear it
In the hums of Africa
Here,
Where all meet in awe,
Of the majesty of God's creation
Here
Where different roots meet,
In spirit of the same ancient true,
In rhythm to the same ancient song
I am because you are
Where water falls in thunderous grace,
Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu.
We are one



Tales of a town

The streets of the city are almost cold
Almost quiet
I walk through the town,
Like I've known it my whole life,
The old men here are nice too,
They know me not yet still they call me
daughter

There's an old aunt,
In one of the shops in town,
She tells of days of her youth,
Back when she felt no cold

She's colder now,
Yet she tells her tale with a smile on her
face,
It makes me warm inside,

She talks of days when her wares sold like
hot cakes,
I touch the art that graces her shelves
Here where she makes the bread for her
children's table,
In my hands are beads and stones
Before my eyes is wood and glass,

In each creation is her dreams
The Dreams she hold
For her growing children

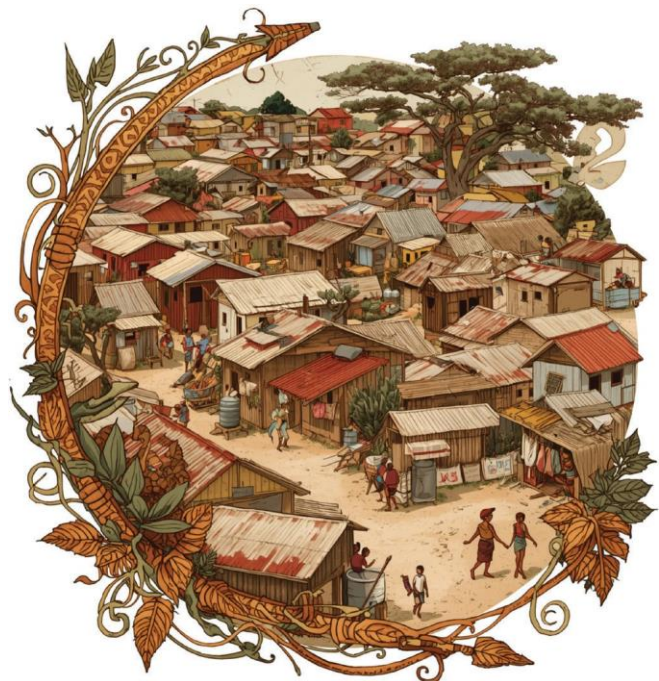
But still a question rings,
As I ask the price,
"\$5" she says
"For that pair of earrings,

I look at them once more,
For the earrings perhaps.
But what is the price of the love,
The passion,
The hope and the dreams,
Embedded into each piece of each pair?

The play of love

The night draws to an end,
To the sound of drum beats,
A song new,
Stories of a time long gone,
The story of a love,
That could not be,
Tears of a maiden,
That fell into the river,
Watering the gardens,
Of the goddess below,
Africa painted,
As the spirit sacred,
That give and took,
To the pleasure of her mirth.

A beautiful tale,
Of a love that conquered,
Even as the lion,
Swore to eat their hearts.



Credits / Publication Details

Title: A Poetic Zambezi Experience - Anthology of Poems

Project: Inaugural Zambezi Meetup Residency

Produced by: Youth for Innovation Trust (YIT) and Wordsmash Poetry Movement

In collaboration with: Residency artists and partners in Zimbabwe and Zambia

Supported by: British Council and the Embassy of Switzerland in Southern Africa

Publication year: 2026

Place of publication: Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Contributors:

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Phathisankosi 'Starlight' Moyo

Muuka Mwendalubi Siatwiko

Cebo Ncube

Genre: Poetry Anthology

Language: English, with selected indigenous language expressions

First Edition

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Book Designed By Dalubuhle Moyo (@Daluxcrafts)



Supported by:

