

LIFE

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Cartoon commentary lifts the lid on the serious world of politics

● Editorial cartoonist of Business Day reflects on his artistic career

Brandon Reynolds

On December 7, I drew my daily cartoon live inside the gallery as part of Iziko South African Museum's Thursday late programme.

I had been invited to be part of Derek Bauer's retrospective exhibition at the Cape Town gallery. It is an incredible honour to be part of such a prestigious show of a great South African cartoonist and this occasion allows me to look back at my 15-year career as the editorial cartoonist of Business Day.

I was born in Cape Town in 1970. I grew up in Lansdowne and Athlone on the Cape Flats. My parents nurtured my drawing talent from an early age, collecting stacks of used paper and letting me draw on the backs of greeting cards, cigarette wrappers and matchboxes.

I attended art classes at weekends and continued drawing throughout high school, although art was not offered as a subject at my school.

While staying with my maternal grandparents in Bridgetown, when I was about eight years old, I discovered a book of cartoons by the British cartoonist Giles. I assumed it had been brought home by my grandmother after no one claimed it from the lost-and-found shelf where she worked.

My grandmother was the caretaker at the lady's toilets in the concourse below Strand Street in Cape Town. Thank you to whoever that was who left the book in the toilet. I loved every page of it, the detail intrigued me and I would look at the amazing cartoons for hours on end.

Another book, a St John's Ambulance First Aid Guide that was left behind by a boarder who lived with my grandparents, also had my attention. I enjoyed its graphic drawings of broken, bleeding limbs and bandaged heads.

At that point, my career trajectory could have gone either way. I considered becoming a doctor, but never imagined I could be a cartoonist.

I attended St Columba's High School in Athlone with a cast of incredible characters, including the late Robert Waterwitch, who was a year ahead of me. We shared a love for music and

started a reggae club in 1984, met after school and watched films such as *Third World Prisoner*. In *The Street*, Countryman and Babylon, and discussed the sociopolitical themes of the music and its heritage.

Waterwitch's journey from youth activist to MK soldier, and his violent death at the hands of security police in 1989, had a profound effect on me and continues to inspire and inform my work. I painted two portraits of Waterwitch and Celine Williams, killed in the same incident, which was displayed at their funeral in Athlone.

After that intense period, I saw something in a newspaper that completely made sense to me as a future career. I saw an editorial cartoon by the late Derek Bauer depicting the then president PW Botha in a moment of extraordinary denial. It was an extremely funny cartoon, but made such a strong statement about the politics of the time.

After high school, I attended the University of Cape Town's (UCT's) Michaelis School of Art where I lasted just one year. I floundered miserably in an attempt to explore cartooning while trying to catch up on the entire syllabus of high school art, which almost all of my first-year white classmates had learned.

Basil Juries, a neighbour and mentor who had studied graphic design, encouraged me to not give up. The following year, I enrolled at the Ruth Prowse School of Art for their three-year graphic design diploma.

At Ruth Prowse, encouraged by my teachers, I was able to bring my cartoons and drawings into many of the graphic design projects, something that was curiously discouraged at UCT. I was also introduced to the airbrush and its layers and masks approach to painting, which I still follow, although now in pixels and not tiny paint droplets.

After graduating, I freshened in the newspaper and advertising industry for a few years, but as the miracle of 1994 unfolded, I felt called to try and take my place as a cartoonist in the new SA. I worked feverishly every day for many months trying to learn the unwritten rules of this mysterious craft, analysing cartoons to discover what made them work.

In September 1994, after a



Time magazine-inspired all-nighter, I produced a cartoon on the situation in Haiti, where Gen Raoul Cedras had been "persuaded" by the US to step down in favour of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the man he ousted in a 1991 military coup.

I was so proud of my efforts that the next morning I was standing outside the offices of The Argus with the cartoon. I called the managing editor, the late Tim Patten, from a payphone outside Newspaper House on Greenmarket Square. After I explained my cartoon, he invited me up to his office. He was the classic newspaperman, replete with a pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth and stacks of newspapers scattered around his office. He chuckled as he studied the cartoon and said he would show it to the editors at the news conference.

At the time, The Argus had no

staff cartoonist. The next morning, Patten called me to say that my work would be appearing on the editorial page that day. I was ecstatic! He then asked me what I had for the next edition.

"What... tomorrow?" I asked. "You want another cartoon for TOMORROW? That cartoon took me SIX MONTHS!"

Over the next few months, I produced a few more cartoons for The Argus.

I was also invited by Idasa (Institute for Democratic Alternatives in SA) to draw the cover cartoon for their quarterly publication *Democracy in Action*.

In 1995, I was given my first regular spot when I was approached by the editor of the *Weekend Argus* to draw two cartoons a week. I was also asked to contribute one cartoon a week for the daily editions of The Argus.

I began to appreciate the



Prolific: Brandon Reynolds, above, has been submitting cartoons to Business Day since 2002. He also contributes to other publications in SA and abroad. Left, his cartoons on display at the Iziko South African Museum. /Nigel Pamplin / Iziko Museums

enormous amount of reading and research that informed a great cartoon so I plunged head-first into the sea of information

that surrounded me and applied myself wholeheartedly to creating and drawing cartoons.

When Bruce Cameron, the

personal finance editor, offered me a full-time job as illustrator-cartoonist-information graphics artist for his weekend supple-

ment in 1997, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

I continued to draw the *Weekend Argus* cartoon but also developed my computer graphics and pixel-based computer illustration skills.

I married Rose-Anne Lawrence in March 2000, and accompanied her to Atlanta, Georgia where she took up a two-year teaching post. I was employed as a news graphics artist by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and later in their advertising creative department. As I was a guest of the US, I felt it was too easy to draw political cartoons and take potshots as an outsider. I believe cartoons emanate from a deep sense of belonging where your destiny is woven into the future of the country you call home.

When we returned to SA in 2002, I was offered the position of senior graphic artist at Business Day in Johannesburg. The editor, Peter Bruce, expected me to submit a small daily editorial cartoon for publication. I was back in the game! My first cartoon for Business Day was published on November 1, 2002.

I resigned from the full-time staff of Business Day in 2004 to move back to Cape Town and became a freelance editorial cartoonist, which enabled me to draw for other publications.

I began drawing the *Eastern Cape Herald's* cartoon a few days a week until I was re-appointed as the editorial cartoonist for *Weekend Argus* in 2007 and remained a contributor to various independent Newspaper titles until earlier this year. In 2007, I was also invited by then editor Tim du Plessis to draw the editorial cartoon for *Rapport*.

I now draw seven editorial cartoons a week for *Business Day*, *Business Times* and *Rapport*, in two languages.

I also regularly contribute work to cartoon collections, books, academic books, news magazines and other publications in SA and abroad.

I was awarded the Standard Bank-Sixville Journalism Award for editorial cartoons in 2013 and 2017. I am also a member of the international cartoon group *Cartooning For Peace*.

I feel incredibly privileged to take in, absorb and then draw the trials and tribulations of our crazy country every day. Each cartoon is an offering, a reflection and a paean and is my small contribution to the story of this place we call home.

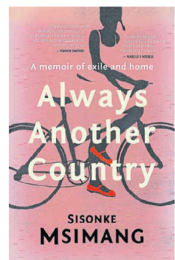
BOOKS

Memoir portrays exiles' lives as peripatetic outsiders

ALWAYS ANOTHER COUNTRY
Sisonke Msimang
Jonathan Ball Publishers

Rehana Rossouw

Liniality is not a word in everyday use but it best describes Sisonke Msimang's unforgettable memoir. Her life, birthed in exile and forged during frequent arrivals and departures, places her on thresholds where she peers into the promise of another



most exiles she had a relatively stable family life with two parents and two siblings, attended excellent schools and explored several options for a university education.

As a child playing skipping games while chanting the names of ANC heroes, Msimang realises that she is different to her Zambian neighbours and appreciates the shelter they offer her family and the cohort of comrades who collapse into their hospitality. Until she is sexually assaulted and decides to tell no one because that would mark her

offers documentation but no community for African exiles. For the first time, Msimang is derided because of the colour of her skin.

Her masterful use of language and keen insight into the tribulations of statelessness brings to life a childhood of not belonging while yearning for a home she has never seen.

"The immigrant child knows that the key to survival is in the infection points. It is in the way the head is cocked, or the ease with which the foot pushes off the pavement before the first pedal on your bike," Msimang

Kenya and it is there, at the age of 16, that Msimang watches Nelson Mandela walk out of prison. While her parents are wary about returning, she can visit SA with her Canadian passport. She has an urge to giggle at white, mustachioed officials at Jan Smuts airport, "a fascist fortress, designed to withstand attack".

A cousin takes her out for a night on the town. Their evening in Hillbrow is marred by a waitress shrieking at a pavement troubadour and Msimang and her cousins flex their free muscles. They elicit a

be constantly misrecognised." She votes for the first time in April 1994 in Chicago, "it marks my place in a new nation at the start of a new era".

Back home in SA she moves in with her parents in a middle-class neighbourhood with no other black families. It is a place where "white righteousness is so powerful exhibited, it is easy to forget apartheid was a crime against black people. You might find yourself thinking whites were the historical victims of a system of injustice."

Msimang's account of her gradual falling out of love with

stopped believing that the leaders of the ANC are somehow special. I should never have believed it in the first place: that sort of thinking is dangerous," she writes. "But I did because I grew up in a magical bubble, in a time and place in which the worst excesses of the liberation struggle were invisible to me and the best of what we could be had been laid out in front of me, painted like a picture with words of strength and struggle and dangled before me by the uncles and aunts who danced in our living room."

After five years of struggling in a fancy neighbourhood in a beautiful house, Msimang discovers that in SA nothing is safe, "especially not your dreams." It is time to leave again, uprooting her children.

The pages of the book are laced with love for her family, particularly her parents. Her description of choosing a path different to theirs is filled with appreciation for the choices they made and the politics they passed to her.

SA's descent into a downward spiral under the leadership of venal politicians

new life and assesses its ability to enfold and welcome.

The dictionary definition of liminality is "the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage, during which the participant lacks social status or rank, remains anonymous, shows obedience and humility, and follows prescribed forms of conduct and dress". And so it

was in Msimang's childhood – born to an ANC guerrilla and Swazi accountant, reared in exile and moved several times before returning to the promise of a free SA.

Unlike most black South Africans in the 1970s, Msimang was born free in newly independent Zambia. Unlike

as an outsider. When her parents announce that they are moving to Kenya soon after the assault, she is relieved.

Brash Kenya is far less sympathetic to South African exiles and freedom fighters and the three stateless Msimang girls are in need of citizenship. Once again they are uprooted and taken to Canada, which

writes, "We had been indulged not in the usual way one spoils a child, but in the way that only a community of exiles can do. We weren't just children – we were representatives of an ideal. We were a clean slate and a fair go and a new breed and everything our parents wished for in SA."

The family moves back to

grudging apology and the story they tell for years is about their chutzpah when they encounter "the racism we have been told about our whole lives".

Msimang leaves again, for Macalester College in Minneapolis, US. Here, being black has a new meaning, "to be looked through, passed over, ignored or locked away. It is to

the ANC is similar to the tales of many birthed into the movement. Her reasons for the split are shared by millions more – HIV/AIDS denialism, xenophobia, crime and the callousness of leaders in the face of the generational poverty crippling poor black South Africans. But her heartbreak is a lot more personal. "I have

She marries an Australian and moves into upper middle-class Johannesburg suburbia to raise their two children. Placed firmly "in the heart of whiteness", she struggles to negotiate the demands placed on an "African feminist madam ... shot through with paternalism and condescension and liberal sloppiness".

has been described in many books, but Msimang's liminal eyes provide a keen and unique view on how much it wounds those who sacrificed much and contributed courageously to the new democracy in the belief that it would make all childhood dreams come true. It is required reading for all who care about this country.