

Helen Fallon, Deputy Librarian at Maynooth University meets African people living in Ireland. Through sharing stories we can reach a better understanding of each other and our hopes and dreams.

Sharing Our Stories

From Durban to Dublin, Ireland: Lucky Khambule tells his story...

Early Days

I was born in KwaZulu-Natal Province in Southern Africa. Growing up in the 1960s, Apartheid was something that shaped my life. This system sought to totally separate black people from white. The government set up homelands in rural areas, and townships in urban areas. There were mass evictions with black people forced to move to these less developed areas. Everywhere, even on the beaches, there were signs “whites only.”

There were six children in my family, two boys and four girls. I was the second oldest. I never knew my father; he wasn't part of our life. At home in the village my grandmother raised us. My mother Rose worked for a white family in Durban. It was a two-hour journey from the village, so we only saw her when she came home on holidays. She sent money to my grandmother Liza. That was how we were able to go to school and survive.

South Africa was first colonised by the Dutch, the British followed. Anglican missionaries from Scotland worked in my home area and this was reflected in the names people were given. I was named Lloyd when I was baptised, but because I was born with a caul, a sign of good fortune, I was called Lucky. On Sundays all the villagers went to the Anglican church. For the remainder of the day, we were not allowed to go to the garden or do any work.

Grandma kept cows, pigs and chickens. We helped to care for the pigs. She was a very able person and would bring the pigs to auction in the town. She also ploughed the fields and grew crops, including maize and beans and milked the cow. We helped with all the farm work and every day we had fresh milk and vegetables. Grandma taught us to bake bread. We did this outside on wood or hot coals positioned between stones. I developed a real expertise in regulating the heat! We also had peach trees, a fig tree and apples.

Like the other homes in the village, our house was made of mud bricks. Soil is mixed with water. Sticks are erected as the frame of the house, soft mud is pressed in between the sticks and an outer layer of mud put on. The final plastering is done with water and sand and then some houses are whitewashed or like ours, painted blue.

The Mines

Twice a year men from mining companies came to our village to register men to go and work in the mines. The men registered and then waited to be called. They left home, often for a year at a time. Most sent money back to support the family. The mines were in an area called Transvaal, near Johannesburg. They were huge operations, with people coming from neighbouring countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Angola. South Africa has gold, diamond and platinum mines. The vast profits from the mining go to large international companies, many with headquarters in Britain.

School

Although I was raised in the Anglican faith, I went to a local government primary school. At home we spoke Zulu. At school it was compulsory to learn three languages – Zulu, English and Afrikaans. A lot of the books I read were in English. There were adventure stories like *Treasure Island*. There was nobody like me in those books. They were all white people. We didn't learn the history of South Africa, instead we learned about Napoleon and the kings and queens of England. We would not have read in newspapers about Nelson Mandela being sentenced to life imprisonment in 1962. I never

actually saw a photograph of Nelson Mandela until he was released in 1990. There were no libraries: there was no internet, just a government controlled press.

At 14 I finished primary school. I was very good at Maths and wanted to study science. While there was a high school in the village, it didn't offer science. So I



Lucky Khambule from South Africa, now living in Ireland. (Photo: MASI)

went to a Catholic boarding school called Lourdes, in Transkei, one hundred miles from home. My mother paid my school fees and wrote regularly. I loved getting her letters. Once she enclosed a stamp for me to write back. She had bought the stamp in Durban and it was South African. She hadn't realised I would have to use a Transkei stamp, because it was a separate state (Bantustan). Sometimes she sent me a two rand note and then I felt so rich. It wasn't easy for her, keeping me in boarding school and sending money to Grandma to raise my five siblings at home. During the holidays I visited her in Durban. It saddens me to remember how her health was deteriorating. She had high blood pressure, asthma and various other ailments. When she died in 1982, I had to leave that boarding school as there was no money to pay the fees. I went to another school in the Transkei to finish my education and was able to stay with relatives there. I had to learn IsiXhosa for this area. It is a clicking language and was difficult to learn. From there I did the Matric exams.

While my dream was to go to university that wasn't feasible. I had to earn money to send to Grandma for the family. I worked for a year as an assistant teacher in Transkei, then I began what was to be my career to this day, in insurance. I worked my way up from being a messenger to a managerial position where I was involved in training and customer service. Durban was my headquarters for many years.

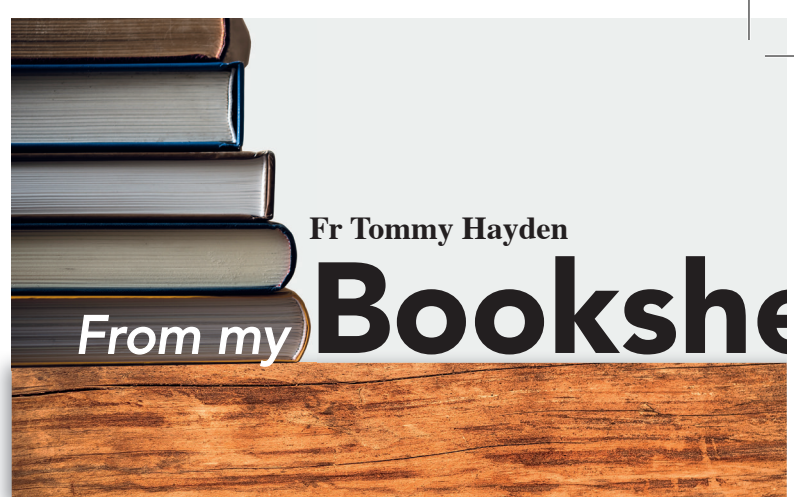
Life in Direct Provision

Due to political violence north of Durban in 2012, I came to Ireland in 2013 to seek protection. It was a complete shock to me that I couldn't work or study. What struck me was how similar the apartheid system and the Direct Provision system are. I lived in Direct Provision in Cork for three years. I became an activist for asylum seekers and co-founded the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), which advocates for greater rights for asylum seekers and calls for an end to Direct Provision. I was very active in the campaign to allow asylum seekers to work, which resulted in the High Court ruling that the ban on working was unconstitutional.

Moving on

I work in the insurance industry here with Standard Life and live in Arklow, Co Wicklow. I have residency now and am in the process of applying for citizenship. My work as a volunteer with MASI takes up a lot of my free time, but I make time to listen to music. I love Bob Marley, the lyrics of his songs, particularly *War* and *Three Little Birds* are so relevant for the time and space we are living in.

I believe that we can all work together to make sure that those who do not have chances to better themselves can contribute positively to this country with their dignity completely restored. ■



Fr Tommy Hayden From my Bookshelf

I guess when someone sets out to read a particular book review they want some advice as to whether the book is worth a read or not. I can answer that question immediately by saying that Sean McDonagh's book *Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs* is worth both buying and reading for two good reasons. Firstly, for the information he provides about the changing world we live in today. Secondly, for highlighting the challenge that is facing the Catholic Church and similar institutions in whether we humans can access something like an objective moral order or system of ethics with which we can evaluate our lives. That is, some guidelines to direct our behaviour and our relationships with our fellow humans and with the universe.

With regard to the Catholic Church he quotes a saying of Bernard Lonergan, the famous Jesuit theologian and philosopher from the 1960s: "The church always arrives on the scene a little breathless and a little late." Later on, I will elaborate on this.

When you watch some of the nature programmes on TV, especially those that have to do with primates and some species of birds, you sometimes come across very fundamental practices of tool-making or the use of particular objects to do a job of work. One example is the way Capuchin monkeys in Central and South America use stones to break open cashew nuts. It seems that, as the monkeys grow older, they can even develop better ways of managing the task. However, no matter how expert they become, the skill does not pass through their DNA and each generation has to learn for itself.

Compare this information to what we find on page 69 of McDonagh's book where we have headings like, "The Use of Robots and Algorithms in Banks and Shops" and "The Use of Robots in Education". In evolutionary terms the world of the primates and today's world described by McDonagh are trillions of light years apart, even though the present situation is along the spectrum of a process that began in the life of primates and was continued by humankind.

The idea of robots is something most of us can visualise. An algorithm is a different kettle of fish altogether and it's a new concept for most of us.