

Description

This body of literature is a small segment of a story about an Anthropologist named Imphi from Zimbabwe. This story displays the difference in the cultural perspectives and approaches to this study of time by substituting terms for many of our popular Paleoanthropological vernacular.

Most of these Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele terms elude to the “earth” and utilize more vague explanations that force a more interconnected and “spiritual” approach to Paleoanthropology.

This text is heavily inspired by authors like Nnedi Okorafor who pull from various African mythologies and practices. We often see healthy educational discourse in the study of Paleontology such as the debate between lumpers and splitters (Hublin, 2014). Even considering this healthy discourse, we find that culture often plays a noteworthy role in people’s perspectives on such matters (Bocquet-Appel, 2003). We cannot split up these points, “Cultural (for example, density of archaeological sites), genetic (indications of migration), and paleoanthropological (skeletons in cemeteries)” (Bocquet-Appel, 2003). This is one of the reasons why I chose to paint this picture of Paleoanthropology from the perspective of a Southern African pupil whose perspective is heavily influenced by his Nation’s history and culture. As I explain through the brief thought process of the main character Imphi, Paleoanthropology not only tells us facts of which primate belongs to which taxonomic group, but it also tells stories of the different cultural practices of those groups at that time. This glimpse into the book focuses on the ancestral practices and beliefs of Southern Africa by looking at the stories derived from the fossils and tools left behind.

Legend:

***Ixesha**=Time and Personification of the Earth*

***Umhlaba**=fossils*

***Inhlabathi**=layers of strata deposited over time*

***Izimpande**=Carbon(C-14)*

***Mosi-Oa-Tunya Falls**=Victoria Falls*

***Unyaka**=One year*

***Moon**=One Month*

***Fractured**=Splitters*

Chapter 2: Nalutho War

... I had only been seer apprentice for just under two Unyakas now. I found the title “seer” slightly misleading as I had no understanding of any mystical arts nor any foresight into the spiritual realm... to the best of my knowledge at least.

Gweru had been my instructor for what seemed like only a quarter blue moon if any. There was so much to learn regarding the earth stones and their stories. I was eager to know more. To “see” more. To think one could read hundreds of thousands of stories in the often-tenuous remains of time and soil. Some called it “Paleoanthropologist” or “Paleontologist”. Here in South Africa and Zimbabwe the more traditional ones called it “Seers of Earth”. We were the only ones who could tell the stories of the “earth” as we did in our town.

From my teachings, the earth was the great library of time and humanity. Others coined the term “fossils” and “radiometric dating”. Our ancestors called these fossils and other tales of the past life “Umhlaba”. The layers of “earth dust” (inhlabathi) preserved these various forms of Umhlaba so we could track when in time these beings roamed the earth and what story they wanted us to share. Izimpande was what we used to “organize” these stories through time. Some chose to label this process as the radiometric dating method (Carbon-14 Dating method). Carbon-14 is the element found in all living beings and once this spirit leaves the organism the “root of life” is no longer absorbed from the inhlabathi or the environment. It turns into N-14 (nitrogen-14) and this aids us in reading into the Izimpande and where it stood in time.

In our tongue we often eluded to the spirit and interconnectedness of such things with our descriptions, hence the vague spiritual terms. Our forefathers and mothers often passed these stories down through words and mystic arts. It was never too clear as to how or why they did this but apparently, they experienced a long time of pain that forced such connections and expressive dialects.

I found the more technical teachings from Gweru at times extensive and fulfilling. This “*root of life*” that we find in so many living organisms was able to hold onto so many stories for so long.

Our lands were the epicenter for “life” and so much of it. or at least I liked to think it was.

Based on the geographical studies I conducted with Gweru it seemed millions of years ago we all were one. I wondered if this earth had not experienced such drastic tectonic shifts all those lifetimes ago that maybe we all wouldn’t differ in culture and language so much. Nor in physical attributes.

But this thought was unlikely. *What was would always be, we are different.*

But I understood this train of thought was often debated between certain groups. I often found myself piled into the group of the “*Fractured*”. I didn’t like that term. It spoke of the entitled elders whose perspective stood at the pinnacle of our “knowledge”. But their thought process often lacked a sense of inclusivity to growth and the evolution of knowledge. Which meant they were stunted in their wisdom.

I often recognized the varying features between other primates and species and I had heard the ancient tales of the remains of the Nalutho skinned people. Some still lived today, and their sights and gifts were ones to mention and heed. Many believed they were of a different species all together. More so in the past. But I disagreed. To my eyes we all resembled each other in so many ways. But this was a much deeper-rooted discussion. In the past they had been outcasts and were gathered for their “vision and strength”. That is if they were caught. Which was not an easy task. I felt for their ancestors.

Peppa. I thought as I closed my eyes briefly and breathed deep. *I am sorry for your pain.*

Those who were different were often demonized and fake tales were made about their essence. But it was said that in the bones of the Nalutho that their story remained untouched and clear to those who listened. This was one reason why I was set on being a diligent and knowledgeable Seer of the Earth. I wished to understand their true stories and the wrongs that were done to them. It was true and undeniable that some truths of their past were preserved through some mystic arts.

I had experienced such things before.

It had been written in the silver linings of the Untouched Book that the one who saved so many all those years ago may have been Nalutho skinned. This claim, if true, would shift the foundations of not just our own culture but of those in the surroundings regions and perhaps beyond.

I continued to think on such things as a I stared at the large expanse near the Mosi-Oa-Tunya Falls.

I was not anticipating Gweru to arrive so early to my spot of morning meditation.

“You prepare Inhlabathi for our lessons with your words Imphi” He said as he walked up behind me to look at the land we were in the midst of excavating.

It felt as if it was only a few paces away from the Mosi-oa-tunya Falls. You could still hear a slight decent of the earths song as the water poured down and around the great rocks. The expanse which seemed to be the remains of a much larger body of water, was now dry and home to hundreds of quadrupedal creatures who had little need for amphibious tetrapodal features to help them maneuver through this land.

My lessons have a deep foothold even in my subconscious.. I thought

I must be retaining a great deal if I can't even look at such a peaceful place without extracting its historical contexts.

I could not think in peace without delving into a brief history of time now. No matter how mundane Gweru teachings were.

“Let us go” Gweru said after taking in a bit of the view and the light breeze I had been dwelling in peacefully prior to his arrival.

We descended the ridge to the area where we had been excavating. I was not eager to begin another strenuous day of meticulous digging and brushing of Inhabathi in search of these fleeting stories of time.

I had reverted to my usual shirtless aesthetic, exposing my tribal scarring designs. I continued to toil at the relentless Inhabathi in search of its pages of history as the sun continued to nourish the earth with its rays. Gweru, *whom I loathed at this point in time due to his delegation of labour and lack of participation*, had insisted that this pot of land had spoken to him of rich and protective Inhabathi pages to discover. When Gweru had these epiphanies the village and its surroundings tend to listen. Even city folk. Whom I wished I was with at this rotation in the day.

“You see Imphi” Gweru pointed to the gently dusted side to my right as he sat at the edge of the pit

“Brush quickly and gently and our blessed Ixsha will grant you with another tale”

Despite Gweru’s usual theatrics, he was not one to tell falsehoods. Ixsha had revealed a smooth and surprisingly well preserved dark grey ancestral skull. Or at least I presumed it was such a skull. Based on the portion of the Umhlaba that we could see the shape resembled a creature from the taxonomic branch of the Hominidae and possibly even Hominin. The top of the cranium appeared to be reasonably large, similar to that of some Homo Habilis cranial sizes we had dug up two moons ago. The brush strokes had been so meticulous and painstakingly slow in the days prior that I had not taken the time to truly appreciate and observe the site I was so intently focused on.

I took a deep breath. I put my tools down, breathed deep and slow as if I had just surfaced from eons spent under water. I slowly looked around at the excavated earth pocket as I continued my meditative breathing pattern. Once my eyes landed on the skull, I decided to reach out to touch it and hear what tales it had to share. My chest began to throb and pulsate as I slowly moved forward...

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