

ABZ - "Between Twenty and Thirty: Conversations for the New Moon"
Mmakgosi Kgabi and Nicola van Straaten in conversation
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Hello and welcome to the "Between Twenty and Thirty: Conversations for the New Moon" Podcast, brought to you by ANY BODY ZINE! Between Twenty and Thirty is a podcast initiative started by ANY BODY ZINE featuring myself, Kopano Maroga, and Nicola van Straaten talking to different artists and cultural workers about their lives between the ages of twenty and thirty, for between twenty and thirty minutes. Where were they? What were they doing? What did their lives look like? How did they make it work? Join us every new moon, to find out.

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Nicola: I'm just sitting here with Mmakgosi Kgabi. She's just finishing posting something on Instagram.

Mmakgosi: I'm done.

Nicola: She's done. (Laughter). Mmakgosi, take us back. 2005. You're twenty years old, what is - where are you? What are you doing? How are you feeling? What are they calling you?

Mmakgosi: Wow. (Laughter). In 2005, I think I was in my second year of university at Rhodes. They were calling me the 'black widow spider' because I was working for a radio station, for the campus radio station and I was looking for a cool name when I got to Rhodes. I was like, ah, what's a really amazing name for radio? Back in the day when we hadn't yet become "woke" enough to care about our names enough, you know? Like, when we were using pseudonyms and nicknames to identify ourselves. So I was the black widow spider. And you had to say the whole name. People were calling me, were saying "spider" and I was like, But you have to say the whole "black widow spider".

Nicola: You've always been very...

Mmakgosi: ... Precise

Nicola: ... with your names. (Laughter) Ja!

Mmakgosi: Yes, even if it's not the name, it's like if it's there, you have to do the right thing. Do it the way it's being asked, a person is asking you to do it.

Nicola: What were you studying at Rhodes?

Mmakgosi: In 2005 I think I had successfully slipped out of my... I was initially enrolled to do a Bachelor of Commerce and so my majors were Management and Accounts and Economics. And in 2005 I realized that this was not working and I mean, I don't know, I hope this won't get me in jail or in trouble or anything, but I had been on a scholarship from Botswana, which... The person who helped me fill out my forms to get to Rhodes, or to get the scholarship, didn't want me to go study performance or to study music. I had been playing the piano and I was like, I wanna go study the arts because I wanna dance or I wanna do something in theatre and there was no actual, like there's no national theatre in Botswana. So the idea of using government money to go out of the country to study arts is like - it was kind of absurd for them.

So and they also looked at my transcript from my highschool thing that I had been doing; business studies, I had been doing accounts, I had been doing economics and I had done really well because that was the only way you were going to have a future, if you did well in school. So I was like, uh I have to pass everything even if I don't like the subjects. And so that also got me into Rhodes and got me into the Accounting programme. But I wasn't happy. Somehow when I got to Rhodes, also being at Rhodes, being so famous for their Drama Department, they had Andrew Buckland, they had Janet... was it? Buckland. Yes - Janet Buckland, oh my god, I paused there because I never had her as a teacher but she was amazing. But they had like a lot of amazing lecturers at Rhodes. They had Gary Gordon for the dance company, the First Physical Theatre Company and I think, so... I managed to get out of the Accounts programme without losing the scholarship.

Because the thing was, if you were on a scholarship from Botswana and you changed, there was a lot going on. A lot of students were getting to UCT or getting to Wits and deciding that oh, actually, I don't want to study architecture, I want to go study something else. But, if you do that then you lose the scholarship or you have to go back and start doing the whole application all over again. And in order to not do that, I went and saw a psychiatrist on the campus so that I could get a letter to be written to the government to say: I am at the moment not doing well emotionally, which is actually true. It's actually something that I shouldn't feel shy about because I wasn't happy and I wasn't flourishing, you know? And I started going down the stairs and I was like, um... so I spoke to someone, one of the psychiatrists on the campus and she managed to write a letter to say that it would be in my best interest if they allowed me to change my degree without pulling my scholarship.

And I saw also the Dean of Economics or the Dean of Commerce, at the time and I was lucky because his son was in the Drama Department and so he was really open to this conversation of someone going, Hey, I'm actually in this Department of Commerce and Department of Economics and stuff but my heart, like my dream, my passion is performance and I'd really like to get into there and I don't have money, if I get kicked off of the scholarship, to continue studying. So then he gave me the advice, he was like, do you know that Economics is a Humanities subject? So you don't necessarily have to change your scholarship, or like in terms of, you don't have to change the years that you're studying you just have to change your majors but then it's not called a Bachelor of Commerce anymore then you can call it a Bachelor of Arts as long as you keep Economics as your major, which was like eh! Almost there but not completely there. So that's how I ended up, like - then I dropped accounts and I dropped management and all of the other commerce subjects, but I had to keep economics.

Nicola: And what other majors did you pick up?

Mmakgosi: Then I picked up, um... Theatre Studies or Drama as my second major. Third major... I think I just kept Drama and Economics as my two majors. Because I just really, all I ever wanted to do was just be in the theatre. All I ever wanted to do was do Performance Studies and the idea that you had to do all these other electives was really, I was really not interested in that. So even after the swap, I think I had to do English, and I did German and I picked random electives. I picked up Xhosa as well, but the thing that I wanted to do, like - where I showed up was the Drama Department. Ja.

Nicola: All right.

Mmakgosi: That's 2005, ja because I think 2005 is the year I swapped over to Drama Department and then in the end I ended up being at Rhodes for four years instead of three.

Nicola: Okay, ja. And so that means you left Rhodes in two thousand and... five, six, seven...

Mmakgosi: Seven. No, I left in seven, because I got there in 2004.

Nicola: Yes. Yes. Alright. So, after and I mean, like - one of the reasons we're also doing this podcast is 'cause like, I think the trajectory that creative people or artists are like told - like, they're not really... It's kind of like there isn't this thing. Like, you graduate and then it's like - what now? This big like What Now? I've studied art, or some kind of performing art or music, like what did - how did you feel when you graduated and then where did you go or...

Mmakgosi: Funny story. I didn't graduate. (Laughter). But that's...

Nicola: When you left.

Mmakgosi: When I left, ja. Ja, I left in 2007. Didn't graduate 'cause I had the one subject left, I had Economics left and I didn't write that exam. Because still, even after the four years, even after it was like - you need to get the Degree, you need to do this! I just, I felt really, I just - I couldn't. I wasn't inspired to do it, I wasn't motivated to sit and study Economics. I wasn't motivated to get the Degree and apparently get the job afterwards. I think, it was, I was always somehow... You can't say you know, but I just, what I wanted was to do performance. And it's actually possible to be in schools where you just study performance, you know? Um, it depends what your opportunities are or where you're enrolled. I mean, people who went to AFDA managed to do the whole four years, it was around performance, so you're doing - your electives are: you're doing light design, you're doing sound design, you're doing backstage work, you're doing costume. I think if I had had the privilege to do that, that's what I wanted to do. So by the time I'd finished all my exams, done my Drama exams and then I had my Economics exam as my last one. I was like - neh, not gonna do it. And then uh, I moved to Johannesburg and then I... what did I do? No, I moved to Botswana first. I moved to Botswana for a little while, immediately afterwards.

Nicola: Okay.

Mmakgosi: And I worked for radio when I got there.

Nicola: Which radio?

Mmakgosi: For Yarona FM.

Nicola: Ja? What did you do there?

Mmakgosi: I was a newsreader.

Nicola: Mmh!

Mmakgosi: Ja, like still, it's like you're trying to get into like - I wanna be the cool creative one! And then the only job that they gave me was like, ja, news. Because I wanted an actual like four-hour slot doing something. I even had written down a little four-slot of like - this is what my show would be, I can pitch you this show, guys, I really wanna do this. But I was never cool enough for that. And then they were like - you should do news. I was like, okay. So. I would do news and then at the end of every news bulletin the DJ would open up my mic and would say a lot of random stuff and I had my boss one day say to me, "You do realize you're a newsreader, not a DJ." So like - because as a newsreader you're supposed to say, "And that's all. Catch us again in an hour." And then you're done. Or say something smart after that, not something cheeky.

Nicola: Cheeky. What cheeky thing did you say after reading the news? (Laughter)

Mmakgosi: No, I think I had opinions, which were meant for like, youthful DJ's, you know? People who... they were saying stuff, which would challenge what you're hearing, not supportive of the story, but I would

question sometimes. If it was something about politics I would question what had been said or I would question just society in general instead of going, "Yes, that's what's going on in the news." (Laughter)

Nicola: And how long did you do that, and then, so, that was in Botswana...

Mmakgosi: That was in Botswana in 2008 in Gaborone, ja. I did that for six months. Because I was on, like you get the job and then you're on probation. So I was on probation and when I was meant to change my contract to sign a new contract like, oh you did a good job in the past six months, then - I quit. Because I had been to Johannesburg, no, I had been to Mpumalanga. I had been to Witbank, actually. Was it Witbank? I had been somewhere in Mpumalanga, I'm not certain if it was Witbank, I think it was actually maybe Nelspruit. I left Gaborone and I went to Nelspruit on a taxi. Not knowing, first of all, not having checked from how far is Nelspruit. Not having checked what this meant, like how I, where I would be sleeping that night because Mbongeni Ngema was having auditions in Nelspruit and I had seen this in the newspaper and he was, it was a big deal. They were like he's making a new musical, it's as big as... it's going to be better than *Sarafina! II* because apparently there had been *Sarafina! II* and there had been a whole scandal with money, ANC money, Mbongeni Ngema, Witbank, but now they were like, No - he's doing another piece, it's called *The Lion of the East* and there's auditions and I was like: OK, gonna do that.

Got on a taxi and whilst I was sitting on the taxi, at some point, after passing Johannesburg I'm like, So - exactly where is Nelspruit? (Laughter). And everyone's like, Oh you still have three more hours. Um, And like - Oh cool and...

Nicola: And like, there's no Google Maps in these days. Or did you...

Mmakgosi: No!

Nicola: Was there?

Mmakgosi: Was there? I don't think so... I don't really remember.

Nicola: I don't think it - what is this? This must have been 2008 or two thousand and...

Mmakgosi: Yeah, this was 2008 after June at some point. I don't think there was any smart phones yet, we still had key pads on our phones.

Nicola: Ja, ja, ja. Nokia 3310 days.

Mmakgosi: Ja. And this other Nokia, this small, I had this small little gold Nokia...

Nicola: Oh ja!

Mmakgosi: ...with the blue light on it.

Nicola: Nice. Ja.

Mmakgosi: You could play Snake on it. So I played Snake on the taxi.

Nicola: Yes.

Mmakgosi: I read the script on the thing, like the little excerpts that they had printed to say you should learn this if you're coming to audition.

Nicola: And you auditioned.

Mmakgosi: And I got there and I auditioned. There was a lot of people. There was *a lot* of people, it was a community hall, there was people sitting outside waiting to audition. I didn't know them, I came with my attitude like ja, I don't even need to know these people, I don't need to smile. I'm here to do something. I'm also tired. I had to call, I think I had to call my dad to see if he could organize, if he knew anyone in Nelspruit to organize for me to stay over. Because at like 3pm I hadn't auditioned yet and when I finally got in, I had prepared a small, I think I prepared a small dance sequence plus monologue. And when I finished auditioning, Ngema's younger brother came immediately after me and said, "I hope you're not going because they really liked you, but you know, they still have to get through everyone. But, so can you hang out, can you hang around?" And then I just hung around and then the sun set and it got dark and I was like, okay, so I guess I'm staying in Nelspruit. And I stayed over the night in someone's house in Nelspruit. Ja.

Nicola: And you got piece, you got the part.

Mmakgosi: Yeah, and I got the part!

Nicola: Okay, and how long did you do that for?

Mmakgosi: That piece I think ran for... well, we waited for a long time for it to begin. So it was 2008 and I say to, I say to the people at Yarona FM "Guess what? I'm moving to Joburg because I'm going to work for Ngema, you know, so like, this is what I do, this is what I studied. I quit the job and I think I waited for a good two or three months in Johannesburg with nothing to do. Like...

Nicola: Before the rehearsals...

Mmakgosi: Before anything began, before hearing any news about what, like what and where.

Nicola: And who did you stay with in Joburg? Who, where, how?

Mmakgosi: I was crashing with my friend, Neo Mahloane at the time and she was staying in the north, it was in the north of Johannesburg on the other side of Sandton. I forget what this place is called. In the end I had to get a job at Cappello's - worst time of my life.

Nicola: What is that? I don't know what that is.

Mmakgosi: It's a restaurant.

Nicola: Okay.

Mmakgosi: And it's got the whole, I guess, Italian vibe going for them so we had to wear these huge hats, which are not, they were not really mafia type, but the look is supposed to be mafia?

Nicola: Okay - oh my god!

Mmakgosi: (Laughter) And I was wearing... and they had these black shirts. So, they didn't have a shirt specifically for me so like, oh you need a uniform and they picked a shirt, it was too big for me. Um, super embarrassed the whole time, super upset the whole time because you're serving upper class, middle class South Africans who have very little respect for service providers.

Nicola: Ja.

Mmakgosi: Who have very little respect as people who are the same age as you when they see you waitressing, you know? I remember once coming in with a tray and shaking because I had all these wine

bottles on one tray, or wine glasses on one tray, and I'm trying to be like, to put them on the table and not shake and this group of cool kids are like, "You don't have to be so nervous!" It's like - ugh. You know. It was a terrible... I learnt a lot from it. But it was, like, internally it was quite, it was quite a tough job.

Nicola: Ja. And have you I mean, I guess, you have done like a lot of, sort of, in between... waitress, bartending jobs in between your gigs, your performing gigs.

Mmakgosi: Yeah, that's something I've often, that's something I've often done. I think Cappello was particularly terrible. And I think, from Cappello, I decided that I would never...

Nicola: ...do the restaurant...

Mmakgosi: ... I'd never do restaurants again. Like, I can do bar keeping, because even at Rhodes I used to work at the Theatre Cafe. And that was kind of simple because all we had to do at Rhodes, I think, they were selling cakes and tea and coffee and wasn't open in the evenings. And then at nights I used to work at a club called "The Sweet" so I'd work at the Theatre Cafe during the day and then in the evenings I'd work at The Sweet behind the bar. Bar keeping is amazing because you're in the club for free. And you're protected by this - by the bar, and you have alcohol there behind with you, so you can have a drink because you're also allowed to have one or two drinks when you're serving. But you don't have to be in the crowd and getting pushed around. You don't have to deal with unsolicited attention from people. If you want to ignore them, you can.

Nicola: You have power.

Mmakgosi: Ja, there's a power thing and you can watch the whole... There's also like a beautiful - you have a chance to watch people. Like it's a great, I think, I love bartending.

Nicola: So how long were you doing *Lion of the East*? Once it started, in two thousand and - is this?

Mmakgosi: I think it started towards the end of 2009? Like, I'm not certain. I think it was like, to - middle of 2009 or towards the end of 2009. Definitely at the end of 2009 we were in Durban.

Nicola: And at this point, you're like twenty... three? Twenty-four?

Mmakgosi: It's 2009, um, 85, 95, 2005, 6, 7, 8, 9. I was 24, good! Really good maths. (Laughter). I was... In 2009, I was 24, ja, I was 24 and when *Lion of the East* started, we were in Witbank for a really long time. We lived in a house, like, all the performers lived in one house, and we were rehearsing at the Witbank Theatre and then it premiered at the Witbank Theatre. And then from there, I'm not - like, I really can't remember but I feel like we performed in another space. And then we went to Durban. By December, we were in Durban again for like a month or something.

Nicola: Okay. And how big was the cast? Like, when you were doing the job in the field that you wanted to do and did it feel good? Did it, were you like: this is right?

Mmakgosi: I was... I was super excited. It was it was like the dream job and also, like, somehow, sometimes I even forget that I did the radio job after, after Yarona. Like in my mind, I'm often like, so I finished (not finished) I left varsity and I got a big job with one of South Africa's biggest directors. I mean, it was a dream. Like I had seen *Sarafina!* when I was like eight or something. And it was really exciting to work for Ngema. It was exciting to work with this huge like, there was this whole, they had a whole band with them. I don't remember how big that band was, but it was a huge cast of around 30 people or more.

Nicola: And was it well paid? Or was it just paid?

Mmakgosi: It was paid. It was paid, but also I started getting really smart at a young age because I think after the rehearsals, there was a break when we went back to Johannesburg and waited again before coming back to Witbank for the premiere. And then I realized that my role in the piece is - I'm not part of ensemble, and that when they offer me a certain amount of money, I don't even know if I negotiated the right amount. But when they offered me the money, I was like, actually, this is how much I want. And then secondly, I want to have my own room. Like I don't want to be - the ensemble used to have, like, they rented out a house, so which was like a guest house. And in each room, there were, it was, I think that person had fixed it specifically for the cast of the *Lion of the East* or like, that there was a tender and so there's a group of people coming so they rented out a couple of houses. And the rooms would have, like, four single beds in them or six single beds in them. And when we came to do the premiere, I was like, I'm a lead actress so I would like this amount of money and I would also like my own room, because I need to concentrate. Which is not a lie I mean, but it was like - it's something that you don't think you have the right to do, when you do...

Nicola: But you do, ja...

Mmakgosi: Ja. And so but I know, like, when I when I think back, I'm like, I don't think it was that much money, but it was a decent amount for a starting gig.

Nicola: Ja, Okay. And then after this...

Mmakgosi: And then after the *Lion of the East*, I might be getting the timeline wrong, but it's around the same time. Then I got an invitation or someone called me from Botswana to come and shoot *The Number One Lady's Detective Agency*.

Nicola: Oh ja...

Mmakgosi: And that was with Jill Scott and Anika Noni Rose I think. Ja. Also, again, like you've just finished varsity, you're like - oh my god. I mean, there's all these gaps where I wasn't working, like, a year is very long. But for me, it was the milestones like, look, I just did this job with Ngema. Look, I'm in a freaking - I'm in a series, you know, with these famous names, you know, and also to shoot, to come back to Botswana and to come and shoot in Botswana was like, makes you feel like - wow, I'm doing really amazing. Like, I'm coming back to my home country to do some work, you know, even that I thought was paid really well. But I sat with one of the actors one day and fuck - because I didn't have an agent. A lot of the work that I had done, I didn't have an agent. Then I found that I was getting paid four times less than somebody I was on the same calls with! I was like - ah, you got an agent.

Nicola: So, you got an agent?

Mmakgosi: So I started hustling for an agent and I got an agent very late, later in life. I'm not sure which year. But I did get an agent in the end. I also don't know how good or bad that was. You... I somehow - I always feel paranoid about not knowing the transparency of what the actual contracts are?

Nicola: Ja.

Mmakgosi: Because you get an agent and that's the middleman and they say to you, Oh they're offering you this much and then you're happy that you're getting paid, you're happy that hopefully you'll also be getting paid on time. And but I think the biggest thing that I was happy about is to be working, to be doing what I love doing. Like, that was the thing. And this thing that in the industry, you have the executive producer who then speaks to your agent and then your agent speaks to somebody who's on their team to call you and say you have the job and then you get a contract sent to you. And then by the time you get on set, you don't know what the offer the executive producer made. Yeah. And you just happen to be doing the job and you're

like, if I don't take the job somebody else is going to take the job. And I need to be grateful that I'm here. That was kind of this mentality in the beginning.

Nicola: And, like - in all these, like, there's periods of work with gaps. Were you, did you ever feel like you needed a base or a home? Or were you like, kind of, not homeless? But like wandering, you know, like always on the move. Where was your stuff? And what was your romantic life like? And like, what was your domestic world in all of these... because I think a freelance lifestyle so precarious and terrifying, like, what were the things or the strategies for like, feeling grounded or rooted or like home. Where did you - or is this something that comes later?

Mmakgosi: And I think in the early, like, the 2008, 9, 10 times, I was crashing with friends who had, who already had apartment or like, who had back rooms in Joburg and places already. And after the *Lion of the East* I met a guy in *Lion of the East* who was a saxophone player. No, he was a trombone player. And he used to live in the east of Johannesburg and I wanted to live in, I want to live in the north again where my friend Neo was living because she was also an actress. And she was, at the time, doing some - she was in a TV series, I think, so it was this whole thing of - if we crash together, maybe you'll tell me about jobs, maybe I'll get lucky and just from you getting work, I might get work which, of course, that doesn't - it doesn't work like that.

But Malcolm then needed a base in Johannesburg and I didn't have, I didn't have money to pay for my own place in town. And then Malcolm paid for an apartment because, he was an artist, he paid for an apartment because - if you pay for this space, then you can put up your art on the walls and we can get people to come and see it here. And in the north it's really fancier than you being in the east, in the East Rand because in the east, not so many people come there. And as a trombone player, he also had lots of gigs in Braamfontein and city centre, just like after you play then you could always crash here. So I kind of, like we were not romantically involved, but I, but we - I think I was of interest to him. Like, nothing ever happened but there was that thing of that he paid for this apartment and I stayed in it and he was like, And you have to stay here and you have to audition. So he was supportive in a way but not pushy, not pushy in any way, at any point and not demanding of anything from me, at any point, he's a really great trombone player. Malcolm Jiyane.

Nicola: So we kind of have just a little bit of time left but when was *Scandal*?

Mmakgosi: *Scandal* was when - so we can skip a couple of years. So after the Malcolm, after living there in the flat that Malcolm paid for, I moved to Soweto and lived with my aunt. So there was like, my paternal aunt, so there was family. And I was like, okay, I don't have to pay for rent and I'm at home and I can and I've got food.

Nicola: Ja. This was 2012?

Mmakgosi: No this was around 2011.

Nicola: Okay.

Mmakgosi: And then - the thing about living in Soweto is, one day someone said to me, I hear you one of those girls. I was like, which one of those girls? And it was a clear thing that oh, I hear you're a lesbian. And there was this thing already happening with corrective rape and there's just this thing of this - this energy between black male South Africans or like, males and lesbians, ja, in a lot of spaces in the world. So then I was like, Okay, Mom, I can't actually live in Soweto. We thought it was a good idea for me to save money and be with family. So I need to move. Then I moved to Melville. After I moved to Melville, we got robbed one day and I was like, I can't live in Melville. I'm scared. So I'm moving. Then I - and I kept going for auditions, I kept audition for ads, I kept auditioning for... I started doing voiceovers for stuff. Voiceover

work was really amazing, but a lot of... In the beginning, I worked, I did a gig for an animation. And then the company went bankrupt and then they didn't pay us.

Nicola: Oh my gosh...

Mmakgosi: And I didn't also get the material because I was like, this would be great. I'm happy that we've done the recording, but can I get the material? The guy says to me, you can't have the material because of laws. And then I moved to Botswana and after I moved to Botswana in 2012, I came to Nkosi's Haven in Johannesburg and I was teaching, a volunteer teaching artist group. And I taught there for two weeks and I was like, Okay, I think I'm actually done being a performer. Somehow just doing that volunteer work just brought something else out in me. And I started teaching the kids there dance, the children there, dance, in their little studio there.

And then one day I heard the aud- like, I got told, my agent was like, There's an audition at *Scandal* and I went for the audition but I was not really thinking much of it. I was really not in that direction anymore. Then I got the job. And then I was living at Nkosi's haven, volunteering, going to *Scandal* on some days to do, to do shoots there. I lived at Nkosi's Haven for a year.

Nicola: And that's where you met...

Mmakgosi: And that's where I met my partner, ja.

Nicola: Ja...So that must have been 2013.

Mmakgosi: Yeah, that's 2013.

Nicola: And then we still have two more years! (Laughter)

Mmakgosi: That was 2013 so I did *Scandal* for a whole year. But still my calls at *Scandal*, I was - they have like when you do a soap opera they... or at least with *Scandal*, you have an A story, B story and a C story. So the A story is the main actors who run the main story and then the B sometimes infiltrates and then the C pops in and out. So it was like yes! I finally got a regular job. Like I'm contracted for the story for a year but it wasn't enough calls. Like sometimes I would have four calls in a month and I was starting to... starting to not - I was losing this thing of okay, this is happening for me here in South Africa. And ah - some somewhere there in between I had been to Germany in 2011 with Constanza Marcas' dance piece that she made in 2010. And we performed at the Market Theatre. It was called *The Offside Rules*. It was a whole thing around the, it was the whole thing around Philip! What was Philip again? Uh - the World Cup.

So there was a piece that they made around the World Cup, which we performed at The Market Theatre. And then it toured in Germany, we toured the whole of Germany in one - for one month, like from north to south, east west. And I then was like, Whoa, there is another world where there is so much efficiency where you're getting paid well, when people care about what you're doing. So from 2011 after that, that thing, I was hooked on the idea of moving to Germany on day. So in 2011, I started learning German even though I was doing it on and off. I went back to UNISA, try to finish my degree. I was like, Okay, I'm going to register and try to do economics. And I could travel and do it and then I was in Berlin for residency and UNISA didn't send me the documents that they were meant to send me for my last semester.

So I went back and I did one semester. They didn't send me the documents and I was like, Well, I guess I can't finish the degree - it's not meant to be. And I kept like, being in contact with people in Germany trying to find ways to come back for residencies, to come back for short programs. And then so - in 2013, when I met my partner and she moved back to Berlin, then I applied with the Goethe Institute for an internship. Yeah, they paid - there's an internship which Goethe Institute supports for... you pick a theatre and they pay you, they give you a stipend for six months. Oh, no, they give you a stipend for three months

but you're attached to a certain program. So I got that stipend and I was at Maxim Gorki Theatre and from there I just kept like applying for other projects and extending my visa.

Nicola: Okay. All right.

Mmakgosi: Then I was in Berlin!

Nicola: Which is where we are now! I think that's like half an hour and I didn't actually get to ask you about *Shades of a Queen* because you did that in 2012. Right?

Mmakgosi: Yeah. I did that in 2012 for the Detours Festival at Wits.

Nicola: Ja. I didn't get to ask you about your own work, but maybe...

Mmakgosi: You asked about my life. Like what I was doing during those times.

Nicola: Ja, that's true. That's true. It's not that long, half an hour. Yeah. But thank you.

Mmakgosi: Thank you.