**Citation: Mandla Langa**

Mandla Langa was born in Stanger in 1950 and grew up in KwaMashu along with his illustrious brothers Pius (former Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court) and Ben (poet and activist). He started writing poetry in his teens, encouraged by his English teachers and Ben. Ben was killed in 1984 after an apartheid agent who had infiltrated the movement ordered his execution on the grounds that Ben was an agent of the regime. His wrongful assassination was to have a profound impact on Langa and his creative work, but did not shake his commitment (and that of his family) to the struggle for liberation.

Langa enrolled for a BA at the University of Fort Hare and was expelled in 1973 following his participation in the activities of the South African Student’s Association. He went into exile in 1976 following a spell of 101 days in detention and being issued with a banning order. He joined the African National Congress (ANC) and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), and was based in Botswana, Angola and Zambia. In Botswana Langa helped establish the cultural organisation Medu Art Ensemble. In the late 1980s he served as Deputy Chief representative of the ANC’s London Mission.

He returned to South Africa in 1992 and led the pioneering work of creating a post-apartheid framework and infrastructure for telecommunications, media and broadcasting which would transform a sector notorious for propaganda and censorship into a dispensation that could serve the interests of the broader society in a free and democratic South Africa. In this work Langa held various significant posts: he was the convenor of the Task Group on Government Communications (1996-1997); executive chairperson of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA, 1999-2005); and chairperson of Phuthuma Nathi, one of South Africa’s broadest based BEE schemes in broadcasting (2006 to the present).

Langa’s central participation in exile in Medu and other cultural formations were crucial in advancing the ANC’s campaigns to affirm the enduring spirit amongst South Africans to defeat apartheid and sensitise the global community through the arts. Medu also convened a number of important conferences that allowed artists and intellectuals from different political and ideological persuasions, operating from South Africa and in exile, to hold deep conversations on the role of art, culture and education. These represent some of the earliest attempts of reimagining and decolonising the cultural and educational spheres in South Africa.

Despite being denied the opportunity to continue his studies in apartheid South Africa, Langa worked tirelessly to develop his craft of writing and become an award-winning author. While in exile Langa published numerous poems and short stories. “The Dead Men who Lost Their Bones” won the Drum short story contest in 1980. He has published five novels, *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989), *The Naked Song and Other Stories* (1997), *The Memory of Stones* (2000), *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* (2008, winner of the best book in the Africa region for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize) and *The Texture of Shadows* (2014, the first novel by a South African writer to have been translated into Mandarin). He completed Nelson Mandela’s posthumous *Dare Not Linger: The Presidential Years* (2017), with the undertaking of keeping the work true to Mandela’s legacy and writing integrity. Langa is currently working on his sixth novel, *The Heartbeat of the Storm*.

There are a number of key recurring thematic motifs that run through all his creative work. The first is an abiding exploration of the experiences of ordinary people as they wrestle with the challenges and joys of the everyday amidst the intrigues and corruption of authority and its abuses of power. The politics of memory are an indispensable part of Langa’s concerns. He cautions against the dangers of forgetting and also reminds us of the ethical principles that should inform the processes aimed at healing individuals and society.

Otherwise, Langa suggests, the pain and tragedies of the past will continue to haunt the landscape and the citizens of the country. Langa’s oeuvre is an archive and celebration of the resilience and generosity of ordinary people and his vision of a shared humanity and more humane world.

It is befitting that Langa was bestowed South Africa’s National Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) for his cultural, artistic and journalistic achievements (2007) and the Lifetime Achievement Award from South African Literary Awards (2010). The citation extolled his exceptional contributions to South Africa’s social and cultural life through his advocacy work in the struggle against apartheid and in the building of new formations and institutions after 1994; as well as his remarkable body of thematically profound and masterfully crafted work.

Mandla Langa is one of South Africa’s internationally acknowledged contemporary writers, cultural organisers and a veteran of the national liberation struggle. His biography reveals a complex intertwining between his life-long dedication to the struggles against inhumanity and for freedom, and his persistent courage to engage in critical self-reflection. His national and global stature is an acknowledgement of his immense literary significance and social contribution to South African society.

In the best senses of the notion of the artist as the ‘conscious’ of society, Langa has been admirably courageous by presenting us with textured narratives that act as catalysts for readers to embark on journeys of self-introspection, self-knowledge and renewed commitment to continue with the tasks of imagining a better life and world. His life-long dedication to the struggle against oppression, abiding faith in the humanity of people, his steadfast and selfless vision of a better world and life for all, all rendered with a sensuous and generous aesthetic, make Langa a national treasure. It is befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand bestow on Mr. Mandla Langa an Honorary Doctor of Literature