

From local community developer to international guest lecturer

By **APHIWE NGOWAPI**

A young and proud Makhanda community developer and editor has taken it up a notch by co-teaching a book he edited to Honours students of Syracuse University in the United States.

Zuko Luyanda Gqadavama Ka Somfiyane co-taught the book 'Poor Folks' by Tokelo Hlagala of Mamelodi East with Hlagala online to Syracuse University journalism, political science and education Honours students for three days this week from 20 – 22 February. The connection was made, he says, by Jason Torreano, chief executive officer of the Inkululeko non-profit foundation where Gqadavama works.

Inkululeko offers learners support to finish high school and apply to higher education.

The course examined how education was weaponized as a means of oppression by the apartheid government and how it has been seen as a liberating force in the tumultuous birth of the new, democratic South Africa.

Born in deep, rural Lusikisiki, Gqadavama started working as a community developer when he moved to Makhanda in 2017 to study an Honours degree at Rhodes University.

He has worked with a number of organisations in Makhanda since he arrived, including Sakhuluntu in Extension Nine and Ikamva Youth.

Hlagala is the owner of Afrocentric Media House which uses research, storytellers and motivational speakers to narrate the human condition. He also founded the Knowledge Changes Situations (KCS) book club.

He said he was thrilled with the opportunity to teach his very first book to a class of students overseas.

"I could have not imagined that people in other corners of the world could relate to what I perceived as African stories. This has made me realise that as the human race, we are plagued by the same problems



From left: Zuko Luyanda Gqadavama Ka Somfiyane and Tokelo Hlagala at a meeting of their book club. Photo: Supplied.

regardless of geography" said Hlagala.

For his part, Gqadavama says he was prevented by financial difficulties from enrolling in a masters' degree but says that did not stop him from becoming an academic.

"I'm involved in research, I work with different scholars across the country and globally, and now I've edited a book that is prescribed reading at US President Joe Biden's alma mater, Syracuse University" he said.

He added that he always works "hand-in-glove" with Hlagala and aims to locate the "illuminated human condition into academic context".

Gqadavama continues to support young people in Makhanda through online mentoring.

"I want to emphasise the importance of education. So how do I do that? By living it", he says, explaining that his involvement in both academia and community engagement has led to different institutions, including the University of Michigan and various American high schools, reaching out to him for cross-cultural learning.

"One thing I must highlight and acknowledge about US institutions is they do not just call you to be a guest lecturer but they involve you in the creation of the course, so you contribute with articles," mentions Gqadavama.

In his speaking engagements, Gqadavama mainly compares and contrasts themes of inequality, race and other imbalances between the USA and South Africa.