

**Title:** Burn Out

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**Log line:** Always on the rescue

**One Paragrapher:** Safety first

**Statement of intent:** The intention of this work is to show the daily workings lives of paramedics. What paramedics go through every day, every week, every month and every year; there is always an accident that needs attending. The intention is to make people see that these unsung heroes have done a lot in the shadows; that most people are alive today because these people got there in time.

### **Synopsis**

Musa and Smanga in celebration of Andile’s anniversary; a veteran paramedic who gave them experience in the job, decide to share some of the most interesting “paramedic” calls they received while with him. In these stories, we see how Andile was able to be calm in bad scenarios, stay tough on the job but also how he was merely human; he, too got hit by the calls that came in and he was a minute too late to save the life. The story revolves around us following these three paramedics around South Africa.

### **Genre**

- Physical Theatre (Drama and Comedy)
- 45 min: Evolving narrative since there are new accidents to talk about every year.

### **Main Characters**

***Smanga Zondi (25 years)***

***Musa Dladla (29 years)***

***Andile Ngcobo (46 years):*** Played interchangeably by both performers.

## BURN-OUT (2016)

- Award winning script 2016

### Scene 1- Opening scene

*(Andile & Smanga are driving fast. Sirens wailing)*

*(Flash-forward)*

*(A poem introduces us to this moment of rush and no information. The ambulance twists and turns. We hear the tyres screech. (Lights-out))*

### Introduction

*(In the introduction performers are themselves. The performers are greeting the audience while mocking each other and just conversing).*

**Performer 1:** Hau 201X!!!! Siyabangena!!! Eh gunde unje. Uyacwebezela neh. (We are here. Look at you, such a clean cut)

**Performer 2:** Thank you for the compliment, sorry can't say the same, usamathambo thambo .... (You are still skinny I see) Jokes mfana kithi. Sayikhumbula Woza sishaye!! Woza! (Both sing and dance to KZN's trending track).

**Performer 1:** Yabona kodwa mina bra, I feel like music is taste-less manje

**Performer 1:** But ke Heh! Bra wami. We are here 201X!

**Performer 2:** #201Xhasfallen now it's #201X!!!!!! *(Performer takes a picture with the audience)*

**Performer 1:** Look we made it. This story was told in 2014, 2015, 2016 and now we are still telling it in 201X!! Burn-Out will never fall!!!

**Performer 2:** Eyiiii, let not bore the audience, now let's tell these people our story.

### **Burnt out: 'A paramedic story'**

**Musa:** Yabona in this job, being a paramedic; It's like any other job. It comes with ups and it has its downs.

**Smanga:** You have good memories, which you want to keep and the bad memories, the ones you wish to forget.

**Musa:** Those moments happen right before you.

**Both:** Burn-Out!!

**Smanga:** Burn-Out is one of the most difficult things in any job. You lose everything, your every sense...yonke into inyamalala just like that (Everything happens just like that) *(Both snap fingers).*

**Musa:** Yep, when you suffer from Burn-Out, your mind is useless in your own job. You are stressed. Ucabanga into eningi. Ama nabukeni engane. Loya sis onaleya ASS....loyamuntu omukweleta imali. Yoh!! (You think of so many things. Baby diapers. That lady with a big bum. The other person you owe money to) *(Smanga gives an awkward look).*

**Smanga:** Ey! Ey! Burn-out is when you lose your way of mind in the job. Due to stress or other conditions. That moment when the taxi driver finally loses it on the road. Burn-Out!

**Musa:** That moment when the doctor needs a doctor. Burn-Out!

**Smanga:** That moment when a fine decorated police officer shoots his whole family for no reason

**Both:** Burn-out!

**Musa:** And that's why we came to work today, to honor a great paramedic.

**Smanga:** You are talking about Andile, that guy was a great paramedic *(Competing to grab audience attentions and partner).*

**Musa:** A med above meds bra wami. A friend beyond friends, a president beyond presidents....u Jes...

**Smanga:** Haau ndoda kahle phela. We get it! We get it!

**Musa:** Oh ay, I got carried away, but you should understand.

**Smanga:** Ofcourse I understand, phela he was my best friend *(Ccocky smile)*.

**Musa:** Best friend? Heh izwani phela. Andile was my best friend. I worked with him more years than you.

**Smanga:** Really, Is that how you want to do this? So, what? What? *(Bumping heads)*

**Musa:** Yazi ukuthini, how about we let the listeners decide?

**Smanga:** Agreed, Where, do we start?

**Musa:** The beginning ofcourse.

**Smanga:** You go first, you know what they say, ladies first, ncoooh man, how about, age before beauty.

**Musa:** No bra wami. It's SHIT before the toilet paper. *(Smanga reluctantly goes to sit down)*.

### **The beginning**

**Musa:** Andile was a tall, Tallllll Guy. Excuse my friend for being short. He was tall and black as they come. He didn't smile often but he was always glowing with positive energy. He worked hard for his family. I have worked with him four years in this rescue job. The best years of my career.

**Smanga:** And I have worked with him 6 months kodwa ke lowo six months, it's like forever. *(Pause)* It was a typical day.... we got a call. Andile was on the wheel. It was my first day. I looked at him. The man was like Jesus. *(Musa gives a smile, and then turns to Smanga)*- Smanga, ayi lo owaseShowe (Smanga, not like the Jesus from Showe). Andile was like Jesus. He commanded respect just from looking at him. He said to me "Ey wendoda iba mawash la. Siyona

*indawo yokuhlina*". Then a smile just crept in, but the way Andile changed lanes from left to right and slicing through cars like...

By the man drove like we are in the fast and furious 10 or 12. Although I had my seat belt holding me back, I still felt a need to hold on tight to something else. That is when I clawed my fingers on my seat and they effortlessly poked through. Andile looked at me and said

**Andile:** "Hours, minutes and seconds; Its ok to think we have them. But in this job baba, time is what we do not have but also time is everything".

Just after the intersection of O.R Tambo and Nelson Drive, our moving human driven missile came to rest. Sending us both plugging forward only for our seat belts to yank us back. I looked at him. He winked at me and with that commanding voice he said "Azishe ndoda!" Don't get me wrong even with Andile, there were tough times, if not tougher.

**General (Musa):** We are called to a Pelham case. Possible 2 deaths on scene.

**Musa:** Andile was pushing the car very fast. I looked at him as he pumped his favorite tune up loud. He made a sudden U-turn that flung me back against my seat. With few left and right turns there and there, we were now in the front gate of house no.16 Pelham road.

**Smanga:** In this job, going to a house call can be very dangerous, not only physically but psychologically. You never know what you'll see.

**Musa:** Andile waved me over. I jumped out, grabbed my kit and followed his lead. He said to me. "Keep your eyes on everything". I nodded.

**Smanga:** We rushed to the house. Neighbors crowded the home. People love stories. Andile shoved his way through. Some people though recognized our importance, abanye banendaba (Others did not care at all). One of them rushed us through. We got inside. The first thing that darted through my nose is the smell of liquor, powerful smell. But that was not the worse.

There is blood everywhere. A little girl is crying over her mother who is lying on the floor. On the other side there is the father we presume, lying amongst broken shard of beer bottles. Brains

and blood splattered all over the sofa, carpet and everywhere. Andile says to me “Check the father’s body” It’s formality. He goes towards the little girl. I was busy confirming what my mind already knew. With a skull like this and brains all over the place. This man is sure dead.

Andile called for me across the room. “Pulse, mother is still alive. Check on the little girl and keep her calm”. I try to keep the little calm as she cries once more. I hear Andile going through basic procedures. One rule is always keep the patient talking, and ask questions. Questions that will lead to helping the patient know where it hurts. He screams at me again. “Talk to the girl”. My mouth just dried up and I lost all words.

The little girl looked at me with tears flooding her face. I kneeled down beside her and she threw her small arms around my neck and I felt her tears warming my neck as they pierced through my collar. Andile called again as he was working on the mother. “The bullet missed all her major organs” that call interrupted our little moment of comfort.

The mother regained her consciousness and the first thing she did was to call out for her daughter. The little girl peeled off me, ran and dropped next to her mother who was in pain but managed to embrace her daughter before Andile peeled them off yet again. We rolled her towards the ambulance. Someone, an old lady, took the little girl. The house became more crowded now. As we moved out, people, neighbors were talking, some wailing in tears. I think to myself this is it, we made it in time. What about the next time. *(Car rolls out).*

### **Break (at the office)**

**Smanga:** Yabona that was my first day in the job, scared as shit. But from that day on, I knew what I was here to do. Andile was that man who made me feel like I belonged. Teaching me all I need to know about the ways of this job.

**Musa:** Ahh bra wami that was intense for a rookie. But I understand this job is difficult. There are no light moments. I mean you see ingozi every day. Some you get to in time to help, some you never do. I remember the first worst accident Andile and I arrived in. Yoh! When a job came that man was both serious and relaxed at the same time *(Both laugh).*

We arrived on scene; Bodies everywhere, some dead, some injured. 3 course collisions: Taxi, truck and car. Andile rushed to the car. This lady bra wami uhamba nge Evoke (This lady, my

friend, who was driving an Evoque) messed up blind. Head lying over steering wheel. For sure I thought she was gone, and then she takes the heaviest breath I will never forget. Andile went straight to procedure. Asking questions and the likes (*Transitions to become Andile*). In the car there's a bottle of vodka, half empty. Damnit, she had been drinking. That's when I saw what a mess this country is in mfana. Too fucked up.

**Smanga:** Ja I agree, we live in a messed up country.

**Musa:** This country is kak! Emzansi bra wami. Masimba! (This is messed up. South Africa is shit)

**Smanga:** Ngena la. (Come in) Let me show you.

**Smanga:** You get accidents every day!!! Drunken drivers, unworthy drivers, motor failures, and of course in the league of their own, taxi drivers! Everybody is just a mess (*Performers become these drivers just a little*)

*(After laughs)*

**Musa:** Ayi man. Ayikho into engayona i-flop la. (Nothing isn't a mess)

**Smanga:** So, in memory of Andile, what's the craziest mission he has taken you on?

**Musa:** 2011, June 17. I told myself ngeke ngilikhohlwe lola suku bra wami (I told myself I would never ever forget that day)

**Smanga:** Oh ja!! I heard about that, usho le ka Msunu ka... (You mean the day of...) (*Laughs*)

**Musa:** Haibo wena shhhhhhhh...kunengane la.(Hey! Keep quiet, there's kids here)

**Smanga:** Ngezwa kuthiwa wavele wathi bhuuuuu phansi (I heard that you just fell flat on the ground)

**Musa:** Hai wena. Mina umnikazi wendaba (Wait, let me tell you the story because it happened to me) Let me tell you what happened. (*Transition, shinqi!*)

**(Scene)**

## Pregnancy

**Musa:** An Umbilical cord is thick as your finger. Two veins and one artery spiral together...you can feel the pulse on the baby if you hold the cord near the belly. We are met by an old lady by the door who directs us straight to our patient. Female, about 18 years of age, she is in labor. We roll her in and make our way to the nearest hospital. Andile jumps to the driver's seat. I have to stay at the back & keep her calm. She is screaming and swearing at me and Andile in the ambulance. Suddenly she yells that she's feeling dilations...Haibo!!

**Andile:** She won't deliver, but if she does you know what to do. *(During this moment the baby get delivered in the ambulance with one character playing the mother and the other paramedic)*

*(Minutes later the baby is delivered safely into its mother's arms.)*

**Musa:** It feels amazing when things like this happen in your job. In this job you have to believe that miracles can happen.

**Smanga:** Sometimes you get moments of joy but when you can't save a life, it hurts.

**Musa:** Sometimes you get there, and it's too late, or there is little if nothing you can do but sometimes there is hope. No matter what the situation, we have to soldier on.

{Reading of Articles (use recent articles if possible)}

**Musa:** Jun, 7. 2015. Two killed in Benoni; vehicle accident.

**Smanga:** Jun, 14. 2015. Six killed and four critically injured. N14; west of JHB

**Musa:** Five people rescued after a fire broke out in waterfall mall.

**Smanga:** Then there are those accidents that take a toll on national scales; revealing our recklessness.

**Musa:** September 5, 2013. Pinetown, Kwa Zulu Natal. 27 dead as truck runs red light.

**Both:** Remembering a lost father, mother, a sister and a brother. By working together we can help to save another....may their souls rest in peace.



## Black-Out

### Being a MED

**Smanga:** As a Medic you are trained for various things that you may encounter out there on the Job.

**Musa:** You train for disasters, for car wrecks, for dismemberments, for maiming, for burns so many more but there are always things you will never be trained for. Never be prepared to see.

**Musa:** When Andile told me this, at first I laughed, because I didn't understand. But that's what happens. In this job everything messes with your mind. One minute it is you saving someone's life, the next minute you watch as that life (*snaps fingers*) disappears in front of you.

**Smanga:** It's true. You learn how to value every second of that ticking clock. Like any other job we have our challenges. Every call we get is never the same. It's a new experience. No accident is ever the same. And you learn that people will treat you like rubbish sometimes.

**Musa:** The roads will be a bastard, the patients will want to make your head explode. You will be there doing your best to try and save someone's life so they can be with their families. You are there worried about what if you make the wrong decision but they aren't making it easy.

(Transition, shinqi!)

(Scene)

**Musa:** It had been a busy hot day; PMB is always hot or confused ngeke wazi (You never know). I have had a share of accidents, traumas in the day. One man was stabbed multiple times by his friends/ ex friend as he kept saying. As we try to help him he argues. Blood dripping everywhere around him, I am confused to how he is able to stand or even argue with us. He wants revenge on

his friend. The police arrive to aid the situation but still he is not giving. Until he is cuffed, he swears and spits. we get into ambulance and are off to the hospital. There I was thinking perhaps our day would get a bit easier. As I watch Ayanda blasting out a smoke of cigarette. The same time I ask “Damn why did I quit smkoing”; We get a call. Ayanda stomps his cigarette and we’re off. No time to rest.

**Smanga:** There is a huge crowd in the streets. Always a bad sign, a woman lies there, she has been struck by a car. Thrown 20 feet. She has a small hematoma on her head, and I see her bruised ribs.

**Musa:** I ask where it hurts

**Woman:** “Everywhere. Ngilimele yonke indawo, leyanja ingishayise maqede ayimi.” (I am hurt all over, that dog hit me and didn’t even stop) We place her on the stretcher. And we are rolling off. I get my kit. I put a tourniquet on her arm.

**Woman:** I am not getting any needles.

**Musa:** You need this please. It will help you. Please be still so I can help. It won’t hurt. Its for your own good. Please ma’am.

**Woman:** *(Woman swings violently not wanting to get the shot).* No please. I hate needles. Don’t give me a needle.

**Musa:** Listen ma’am. You need this. Please hold still.

**Woman:** Please cela ukuphuma ke. No. (Please may I get out? No)

**Musa:** LISTEN!!!! Ma’am!!! I am trying to help you!!!!

**Woman:** No. help me without the needle. I don’t like needles. Ngancame ungiyeke ngife! (I would rather die) No needles.

**Musa:** I am here thinking what the fuck!!! Ngiyajuluka the whole day. (I am sweating all day) Trying to save someone’s life and this...this is what happens. “What the fuck is wrong with you!!! You want to die?? Can you just let me help you!!! Please!!”

**Woman:** Please stop yelling at me. Why are you yelling at me? I just don't like needles. *(Cries)*.

**Musa:** As she cries, I feel myself drift away into my own loneliness. I come back. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I just want to help."

**Woman:** Please don't give me any injection...

**Musa:** I just sit there. Wondering what is happening to me.

### **Break (at the office)**

**Musa:** When those moments come in this job, the moments where you don't know what is happening to you. It's when you learn the most important lesson that Andile ever gave us. In this job, trusting, and believing in yourself and partner is important.

**Smanga:** He used to say, 'Yabona boss this job will crush your heart, weaken your mind and when that is not enough it will enter your soul and eat it up bit by bit'. That is why you need time for yourself, conversations that will make you laugh and forget. Your partner can be that person, at home or the one you're working with. And in my worst moments as a paramedic, I remember my partner. Wena bra wami (You, my friend) You were there for me; Every step of the way.

**Musa:** Possibly the worst for both of us my friend.

### **(Scene)**

### **Baby Code**

**Musa:** The situation was baby code.

**Smanga:** Baby code is when a baby is involved in an emergency. One thing about children is unlike adults they don't have choices.

**Musa:** A child can't tell you "Dad please don't drive because you're drunk...", it's all those things that make children special with us. *(Pause)*

**Andile:** We jumped out of the ambulance. The mother who is crying meets us at the door, she quickly directs us to the patient. Qiniso, with his air-way kit, kneels before the girl. She's 10 years old. Asthmatic, pulse is not there. I arrive with a stretcher. We place her and rush to the ambulance for the hospital 30min away.

**Smanga:** We are now inside the vehicle, Ayanda on the driver's seat. I listen to the patients lungs, nothing. No air is passing through. Usually how I assess the situation is, feel for sound between the lungs, especially for asthmatic patients, the sound is a wheezing sound, almost like a broken whistle.

**Musa:** We were told the patient has been getting worse through the course of the day. I don't know why we were called in so late. I call the hospital informing them we are on our way. Patient has been plugged to the monitor. "Hey c'mon get off the road" *(Loudly & Hooting)*

**Smanga:** "She needs oxygen in her lungs or she won't make it." I pull out my laryngoscope, tilt her tongue out the way to try and see the cords. The light illuminates the path but nothing. I can't see anything! They are close shut. I pull out my ambu-bag but I know it's useless with the cords shut, I won't be able to pass any air through.

I go in again. Lift the tongue. Still nothing. I squeeze/push down her cartilage trying to force the cord to view but it doesn't help. I tell myself to push the tube down anyway, I push it through. I don't feel it pass through. I start ventilating, air seems to be passing through but I also feel air in the stomach. Damn it!!! The tube is in the wrong place.

*(Exchange)*

**Musa:** "The girl needs air" I'm fumbling. It feels like I'm out for minutes but it's a second or 2, in this job though a second is priceless. I calm myself, this girl is in the woods, and I need to pull her out. We are five minutes away from the hospital but that five minutes is a lifetime for her. "Focus". I go, lift up again. I see it. The opening. Tube in, I feel it pass through." Yes!" I ventilate her, I feel air pushing in both lungs, stomach nothing. Beautiful

*(Exchange)*

**Smanga:** “Monitor is still not picking up her pulse.” I give her CPR. I stop, still nothing. “Come on! Come on!” I push air again. Nothing. At that moment, Ayanda swirls the ambulance to find a stop. The car jerks, causing it to shake as that happens I see the monitor pick up the heart line. Yes!!! Thank you lord. As Ayanda opens the door I’m already pushing her out. We give her to the doctors. We head back to our vehicle. “I definitely need something to calm my nerves.”

### **Break (at the office)**

**Smanga:** I always want to be perfect. It is what I got into this job for, and, in this job you don’t like to think you can come up short. Especially in this country where every corner can become a potential death zone. One time we witnessed a man burn to his death right in front of us. We couldn’t do anything to help. The situation was too hazardous, we cleared off and watched as a man; A family man perhaps, burns to his death. And I had promised him right there that we will help him; Another lesson I learnt from Andile that day. He said “Never make promises you can’t keep”

**Musa:** You learn no amount of training can ever help in what you’ll see. The best way to forget these situations is to sit together and talk. One of the most personal questions I was asked by Andile was why I got into this job. He looked at me and smiled. He told me his reason. Showed me a picture of his home and his family

*(Almost competing)*

**Smanga:** Andile was from ekasi, elokishin.(From the neighborhood)

**Musa:** Middle child amongst 3. Hlala no Gogo (Living with his grandmother)

**Smanga:** See when his gogo passed on, bless her soul, he made a promise to take care of his young sister and keep his older brother away from more trouble.

**Musa:** So kwakunjalo (And that was how it was) Andile, his older brother Thabo, his sister Noma and niece Princess, always asking questions that one.

### **Family scene**

**Andile:** (Coming through the door) I told you I don't like it when you bring your friends here at home.

**Thabo:** Alright sengizotshelwa uwena manje ukuthi ngenzeni ekhaya? (Oh? So, you get to tell me what to do now?) You think you're better than us now that you are a paramedic!!!

**Andile:** That's not what I said.

**Thabo:** Voetske! Man! You're not even a doctor man *(Transition)*

**Andile:** Hey baby! How about I take you to bed now okay?

**Princess:** Okay *(Andile picks up his niece)*. Baba, can you please sing me a song before I sleep

**Andile:** Sure, I can sing you a song! *(He sings a song, kisses Princess on forehead and tucks her in)*

**Break (office)**

**Musa:** When I listened to Andile, I remembered why I did this job. And that was to save my father. It was never about anything else but him.

### Musa's story

{How his father was shot by a masked man while he and his father came home in his father's kombi. As he dropped off, two men came out of the car and shot his father multiple times. He watched his father die right in front of him and could not do anything to save him.}

*(This scene is re-enacted by one performer while the Musa narrates it to the viewers)*

**Break (at the office)**

**Smanga:** When it comes to this job, we get calls daily, yonke indawo (Everywhere) and people tend to forget that. They forget that we can't be at a million places at once. Sure there are times when we get the same calls like gang shootings, kasi brawls and *(Both)* sithi wehhh e-Willow e-Mlazi again...akla man fuseg!!

**Musa:** People must learn to understand that calling us, akusho ukthi sothi one –two sesila (It doesn't mean we will get there in a second). Government doesn't give us much money. We have no resources. Ambulances? Nowhere to be found baba.

**Smanga:** Exactly my friend. And sometimes the drives or calls that we get are important in our own lives, and we never make it in time; As it was with the man we are honoring today.

**Musa:** Ey bra wami. No day was sad among us paramedic friends than that day. You were with him ngalelo suku bra wami. (You were with him on that day my friend) (Transition. Shinqi!)

### **The last call**

**Smanga:** We go the call, fire at Azalea. Andile had been saying something felt wrong that day. We never expected what we heard from the call. Andile's home had been the one on fire. I was on the wheel. I pushed the car, at that moment I felt I wasn't pushing it hard enough. When we arrived on scene, it was horrible. The house was burnt to the ground. People with buckets in their hands had made a feudal attempt to put the fire out. There was never a worse moment. Two older bodies had been found. Dead.

**Musa:** Princess where is Princess!!!!!!??? (*Looking furiously everywhere*)

**Smanga:** Suddenly we hear coughs, tiny coughs under rumble. Andile rushes towards it and I follow. And there she was, buried under, still holding on to the teddy bear Andile gave her on her Birthday. In critical condition, in the brink of death. We rush her towards the hospital.

**Musa:** I feared Andile was going to lose it at the back. But through the opening at back of our Ambulance, I hear him going through procedure. Asking questions, talking to his little niece. This man...this man. In this situation he is able to find some composure. I hear him promise her.

**Smanga as Andile:** "Everything is gonna be okay yezwa"

**Musa:** I remember him saying don't make promises you can't keep.

**Musa:** As we gave her to the doctors. And come back to the Ambulance, I watch Andile sinking deep into the passenger seat. Lost in his own breathing. The whole world had stopped in that moment for him.

**Smanga:** A few minutes later, the doctor comes out. Andile rushes towards the sliding doors to meet her. As I walk slowly behind. In a second, I see Andile going down on his knees. He gives out the biggest cry I would ever hear from him. I rush to pull him off his feet. He is crumbling right in front of me. I drag him towards our Ambulance.

**Musa:** We had lost Princess. The doctor tells us they did everything they could, but the burn took a toll on the child's body. She says the girl was strong to survive that long. *(Long pause)*

**Smanga:** Andile quit being a medic after that accident. Burn-Out was eating at him every time he stepped inside ambulance

**Musa:** He said, "I see her everytime I drive bru. I can't do it anymore."

**Smanga:** Now and then he comes to visit or we drive to see him. To this day, he is still one of our best guys. That is why we are here in his honor, to tell his story

**Musa:** To appreciate what he did for us, and this service.

**Musa:** And as he would say "No matter how hard it gets, there is no better job than what you guys do. Going out every day to save lives is the best job in the world"

**Musa:** Our advice to you is if you see a para-med today or the next day. How about you shake his or her hand.

**Smanga:** Tell them even though they are in the shadows you appreciate what they do. That you will smile every time when their sirens blast by you.

*(Both performers get into the ambulance and sirens off to the sound of DJ TeekaY- Ngifuna wena)*

THE END