

2022

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Strands of justice

Maryam Kotze

It was at the tender, impressionable age of 12 that I learned what it was like to be a Muslim woman. Only now turning twenty, with the vast influence of social media, do I see it for what it was... sexism at its finest. Religion at its very core is full of controversy and can be quite fickle to discuss, even amongst family. But that does not mean that it is free from discussion.

“Cover you hair!”, “Astagfirullah!”. A common occurrence for me as I was not one for scarves. They felt suffocating and restrictive, a cause of many a discomfort. But in the eyes of one of my teachers, I was naked, apparently. Well, at least in the eyes of God. That’s what I was taught. That women’s hair must be covered at all times for modesty. Yet it did occur to me strange that many of the boys would pitch up without their toupees. They were occasionally reprimanded, however I did not hear the same phrase being used on them. They were never told that they were walking around naked. Of course not. They were boys, but we were Women.

And thus the great divide grew more apparent. And yet here I was, living in South Africa, with the privilege to choose. The moment I left primary school I refused to wear scarves, even at the cost of a daily lecture from my grandmother. But that's all it was... a lecture. Words. Not bullets. Not like the ones raining the streets and schools of Iran. All started because of a single woman. Only two years older than me. Mahsa Amini. In the dark reality we live in, we face the truth that she was not the first, and she most certainly won't be the last. When I open social media my ForYouPage is flooded with videos showing the devastation being wrought on the women of Iran. From honour killings to being gunned down in the streets.

It's everywhere; it is pervasive. Its message persistent. And yet when I look to my Muslim brothers and sisters from all over the world: the ones who cry for Palestine, the ones who scream for justice for the Muslim woman of France, I see them clearly. They remain silent. Voiceless. Not because they can't speak out but because they won't. "They are disrespecting Islam...How dare they burn their scarves!" They don't know it, but I hear them. I know what they are saying. I know what they believe. It is these falsehoods that we are raised with and taught to whole heartedly believe. I cried for them when I watched them burn their scarves and dance around the fire. When they shaved their heads as a symbol of revolution. Do you know why they do it? It took me a while to actually realise the significance. When I

eventually came to the conclusion I realised how much power and strength these women yield. If a single strand of hair deems you naked and immodest, then what will they do when you have none? When they have nothing they can hold over you? What excuse will they use then to persecute the women of their country?

The world stands by and watches as protestors flood the streets of every city in the country. As the so called “morality police” enter primary schools and the girls stand together, throwing bottles at them until they leave. As university students are barricaded into their campuses and the police fire on them all irrespectively. As a little girl dies in the crossfire. As teenagers are murdered and artists and athletes taken into custody for speaking out. Is this really what’s happening in the 21st century, under the false pretense that this is all in the name of Islam? I may not be the most pious or most devout, but I do remember the words of the holy Quran, “There is no compulsion in religion.”

Finally, to the girl, who stood tall in the face of soldiers, who tied up her hair to take her final stand without an ounce of fear or regret, who was executed right after the video fades to black... your fight was not in vain and it will never be in vain. For today you will not be forgotten. You will not fade to black. And neither will we. This is not a fight against religion, it’s a fight against oppression. It’s a fight for the basic human right of choice. Even if it means starting a revolution.

2ND PLACE

Turning a new page

Dhashen Sevenundan

Formed by the soil of my mother's womb and the water of my father, I was merely a seed planted into the fortress of a new beginning. One so valuable that it could be considered gold. The sun's rays penetrated the surface of my skin, which caused the protective barrier that encapsulated me to collapse. I rose from the ground like the true warrior I am and reached for the clouds. With my roots embedded into the soil and my trunk a lateral pillar, I stretched my arms to surround my body and lazed in the brazen sun. As time elapsed through the many years, I bore luscious greenery and mature fruits. Abandoned in an empty space of land, I stand tall in honor of my existence. Just like humankind does in the forests, allow me to disintegrate every perimeter of my wood-like skeleton and elaborate on my tree of life...

Growing up surrounded by daisies was nothing like what the flower itself represents. They are picked and adored by all those who set their eyes on them. They are even selected to be tossed in the occasion of marital bliss and be an omen of love's purity. However, in my case I was merely another plant surrounded by these daisies. The irony is a fine line between equality and inequality. Being in the center but never the

attention in the scope of the public iris. We are always neglected and rather tossed to the side like discarded trash simply for not meeting the standards of a constructed society that does not have room for the queer.

I used to sit puddled in my thoughts while the superior daisies alongside me were adored by the affection of people who visited and strolled past. They would smile and take pictures of them. I was used to the lack of affection from those who compared me to the other plants. Initially, it was simply words of affirmation that they were gifted but that soon turned into them being lifted by their pots and taken to a place called “home”. What did I get instead? Filthy stares, empty sighs of breath, spat on and sometimes they look the other way. They cut me down before letting my leaves reach their full potential. It reminds me of the several times at school when the other kids never picked me for the teams during sport activities and said the occasional “you are on the wrong team” or “he swings the bat the other way” as an excuse to devalidate my existence and being chosen like everyone else does. I am taken for an ordinary thing that is invaluable. They all sliver my stems with their piercing tongues that spit words that diminish my value. They remove the tobacco from between their chapped lips and extinguish its fire in my soil along with my soul causing my frivolous leaves to crawl into hiding.

As the time passed, I was left abandoned on a shelf. This garden store had no more place for a mere plant like myself.

Customers never showed any interest in me and thus I was left behind and then discarded into an open field in the backyard. It is always the same for us plants whose parents leave us once our flowers start to bloom. A plant is supposed to be nurtured with fertile soil, water and sunlight. They say that talking to your plants affectionately helps them grow better but in this shop, nobody even fumbles a sentence at us. How are we expected to flourish when our basic necessities to live life are not met by society. We are shun upon, murdered and discriminated against at home, work and in public. Our lives do not matter therefore men may use our bodies as they please. Ironic considering the fact that the very same society that keeps us in the shadows to "protect" themselves are the very ones to leave us scarred and impaled, bleeding till the drip ends. But when does it ever end? When will we be finally seen as equal?

I believe that us plants who are tossed into the mud are the purpose of God, for if it were not, we would simply disintegrate. However, that is where society is wrong. No matter how much you grind a seed and throw us in mud puddles, we will still rise. This garden shop is a distinct symbolism of what the world is. It houses us all and draws in its customers for them to dictate and mold its "perfect" world. These customers are a society which applies labels to people, a price to give them value and a look to fit into the criteria of their affiliation. What they fail to realise is that at one point, they too were mere seeds, housed in the same

garden store as us. Queer individuals are the plants of today's society, tossed into the mud puddles in the backyard. We are not given the freedom and rights that we deserve. Rights to freedom of speech and expression, rights to live a life not harassed by society, the right to live a life not in fear of being harmed, the right to equal job opportunities as others and the right to equal rights in the scope of the law.

These are rights that society does not have to fight for on a daily basis so why are we required to? Why do we thrive on success and obtain high qualifications in hopes that it would soften the blow to society? Why do homosexual people constantly feel the pressure of conforming to a society that does not need to accept us because we are indeed not a question of acceptance? We are a statement.

Homosexual people are looked down upon and are expected to perform restricted tasks such as wearing a certain type of clothing or obtaining a specific degree. We were brainwashed into believing that ordinary objects, both tangible and intangible, can be given genders such as colours, cars, clothes, degrees, hobbies, music etcetera. It is even worse when black women are a part of the LGBTQ+ community as they are already battling for their rights against gender abuse, racism, abortion choices, equality and still have to fight for rights of acceptance into an obscure society. Enough is enough! Despite our environment, us plants will continue to flourish into trees of life like I am

today. One with branches that provide a home for birds and bear fruits for society, abundance of leaves for shelter from the rainy storms and shade from the blazing sun. Perhaps they were right. We do not have a price tag for our leaves because our value cannot be measured nor can our rights be bought.

Society could cut us down just like they do in deforestation, but we will continue to serve our purpose. We are here to stay. We are the very books that educate the same society that burn us to the ground. We are not asking for rights. We are taking it back. The previous chapter in this book called “life” features the history of our struggles. It is time we start turning a new page....

3RD PLACE

World leaders and their responsibility

Katlego Sekhwela

#OneWorldOneFamily

World leaders and their responsibility to build a culture of harmony and zero conflict in all the countries of the world.

Introduction

From time immemorial wars of men have plagued countries, leaving behind unimaginable and unforgivable consequences. The world as we know it today has come full circle from all the torment of the past. It is cemented in the knowledge of history, the woes that mankind has inflicted on themselves, and it cannot be undone. However, the dent of past misfortunes is not entirely the description of our future; mankind is working tirelessly to change the tide. The psychological imprints and indignation that remain in the aftermath of a war are incomparable (Hunt and Robbins 2001). Mankind remains scarred from civil wars that have plundered their very existence, pillaged communities and families, displacing millions at once. The wars of the past have no share in our hopeful present and glorious future. Unfortunately, remnants of wars are still pestering our countries to this day; from the continued civil wars in the Sub-Saharan Africa to the wars in Middle East, the ghost of

distress is still amongst us. Conflicts between countries are a global concern. The United Nations records have recorded tens of millions in displacements of human beings and the negative outcomes it echoes to refugees (Bove, Salvatore and Elia 2022).

Building a functional society requires intention and will to do so. Nothing will come on a silver platter. It will take an enormous amount of communal will power to bring a society that is fully functional and performing at a global scale. Resolving conflicts between two parties, either countries or societies requires oneness from parties involved; conflicts are not insurmountable but can be conquered. World peace is at the centre of functional countries and ultimately thriving economies. The inability to facilitate peace on a global scale has a hierarchical ripple effect, with countries forming the base of the hierarchy suffering the most. A look at disunity in one country could possibly be attributed to the non-harmonious regional and global governance, and their non-involvement and turning of a blind eye.

Refugees face more than the conflicts televised on the screen; they are physical victims of the war. Experiencing the injustices and the horrors of conflicts firsthand; we imagine it, they live it. Being a refugee is being set up to be a reset button in life, displaced from your familiar environment to a completely new environment that requires you to fend for

yourself. The inability of the UN to gather resources for refugees in some camps has found refugees enduring intense levels of hunger and hopelessness (Bargu 2022). The ordeal of children losing their parents in transition and never finding them ever again is broadcasted frequently. Confrontation with leaders that subject the people to such inhumane experience is minimal from influential political heads, and should the matters be left unattended the scale of inequality will soar to worse heights.

There is a need for revival and renaissance of governance; a fresh perspective on how human rights is handled. Political correctness is on the periphery of humankind and their issues, core to their being is their individual right to live and thrive in any environment they find themselves in. Policy makers who are not sensitised to human suffering and afflictions are majorly to blame on having war and conflicts under their stewardship. The socio-political discourse of the time is also failing to charge these human issues and direct proper dialogue to influence change and create a socio-political environment where accountability is a pre-requisite to leadership.

Accountability of leaders is a great recipe for prosperous and growing countries, flourishing at a socio-economic level as a consequence. Accountable leaders who are consultative and open to debate make healthier societies than those who lead with iron fist and whose ideas are never argued. A

discussion into which political theory is more successful and appropriate than others should be secondary to what accountable leaders need to cater for, the human right to life. Political theorists historically postulated based on their presenting situation, which might be irrelevant and negligible to the current affair, rendering the theories ineffectual to the current political climate. Leaders should be able to adapt and learn and allow each generation of leaders to find out their individual mission and seek to fulfil it.

New fresh ideas should take the platform in the arena of global engagement, to necessitate the pursuit of peace and harmony. Facilitation of such fresh unbiased and unprejudiced way of thinking should take precedence to make the world a better place for everyone not the inferno the refugees experienced. Cultivation of new ideas and thinking is necessary for the development of people, where people are consulted and democratic culture is endorsed. People will differ in ideology, it is inevitable, but that should not create indifference between parties. Different ideologies widen the chances of options, and this is how leaders should think about divergent thinking or philosophies. In the words of Nelson R Mandela, “I dream of the realisation of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent...” which is well applicable globally.

Conclusion

In creating leaders that will build cultures of harmony and zero conflict in countries of the world, we must do so intentionally. A harmonious and non-conflicted country starts in our individual small communities by nurturing leaders and fostering the spirit of leadership in young people; they are the leaders of tomorrow. If accountability is not practiced at a community level, it cannot be practiced in national governance stage. Imagine a world where leaders lead us to a place of no conflict, a place where no one is living with fear of uncertainty, a place where war is not even imagined. That is the world we are building. A world of fair opportunity and stability, equality and fairness. Conflicts birthed by religion, tribes, and regions will be a thing of the past. We aspire for such a future.

POETRY**1ST PLACE****Dear Marilyn Tracy*****Tamika Colbeck***

I woke from a nightmare my back drenched in sweat
releasing puffs of unfinished breaths.
There was that sweet melody again,
pulling me from fear and dread
I had to find this stranger to thank him for paying off a debt.
Barefoot close to midnight I tried to find the mysterious
dream catcher and every time I failed
but this time he was closer,
I could feel his puissant presence cover me like a veil.

"Why don't you play for the choir?" I asked watching him
pack away his violin.

Dark brown hair swaying in the wind against his freckled
cheeks
he smelled like leather and rose and it quickly stuck to my
senses for keeps.
He ignored me but I could tell he heard and packed up,
signaling the show was over.

I followed him onto the train
still he ignored my presence as I watched him drum a
melody
on his thigh.
Only then did I remember someone teasing him for being
deaf and blind.

It was a big night and the arena was at its quota.
It was broadcast live for the world to witness such
greatness.
Conducting an orchestra while being blind and deaf sparked
up quite the conversation.
To me, he was still Marilyn Tracey.
I still remember how he rode with me back home to make
sure I got home safely.

I wanted the best view so I sat on the balcony immersing
myself in his work.
I had heard it a billion times,
I put my hand on his heart and I felt his warm hand on mine.
I was there for every practice and each time it sounded
brand new,
I watched him get frustrated at himself and struggle too.
We stand in different colours playing a familiar tune,
every instrument was perfectly in sync
it was a privilege to see how cooperation and teamwork
made this artwork what it is.

The camera on his face sweat glistening from the intense and beautiful piece.

Deafening silence until loud applause erupted through the arena as they rose from their seats.

I know we are not supposed to whistle and scream,
but I screamed.

2ND PLACE

One World, One Family

Onke Gwentshu

As the sun peeks through the clouds,
as the sky opens.
A world so desolate,
a flock of sheep without a shepherd.
Echoes of corruption and confusion,
loud as a trumpet, can be heard by many neighboring
nations.

Oh, how lovely would it be?
If we could abide in harmony.
Holding hands,
tapping our feet in rhythmic rhymes,
of those who endured the bittersweet trials and tribulations.

Rise Sun of Unity! Set Sun of Division!
Harmony, heal the wounds of revenge.
For you are as sweet as honey,
you make our hearts overflow with humanity.
So, streams of selfishness gush down in serenity.
You are a pillar of this Southern African rondavel,
therefore, we ought to spread out our wings and fly
together,
sharing the good and bad times, for we are one big family.

3RD PLACE

Non-violence

Sibusiso Zakade

The soil of our rainbow is watered
with the blood of missing women and children.
From the ground, you can hear their voices.
Women are terrorised and brutalised
by nefarious and sanguinary men.

Soldiers armed with verbal and physical abuse.
Vampires that suck your
shadow and confidence.
Cowards to the core
but petty-minded.

A man, a male Homo sapien
Inheriting an X-chromosome from his
mother and a Y from his father.
Why did that chromosome not only
give him his masculinity?
But also transported a gene with a
generational defect.

Can someone please tell Adam
that Eve is not a crime,

and he cannot continue to sentence her
to his lust and malicious actions.
It could be anyone who loves enough
to return Adam's rib.

I am a man; we are men,
our innocence is not a pardon,
our silence makes us an accomplice,
our identity makes us associates.
I'm talking remedy to rectify,
and end gender-based violence.
And so, we are responsible for a change.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

The family tradition

Yvonne Phiri

'Sipho is my Son, Mom, and I am going to let the cat out of the bag this time,' Sam said, seething with anger. 'I understand, Son, but you can't do that, it is going to destroy the whole family,' his mother begged him. 'I am sick and tired of the mockery Mom, after all, that boy's blood runs in my veins, and I don't care what the family will say anymore. I am done,' Sam said, standing up and bolting out of the living room like a flash of lightning. In her old age MaNyathi summoned her strength and half walked, half ran after her son outside, grabbed him by his shirt, and said angrily, 'You will never dare do that, don't test me, Sam'. Sam turned around, and his mother's facial expression said it all. It reminded him of that day twenty-eight years ago, when he broke the news to his parents that he had impregnated a part-one student while he was doing his part-three at college. MaNyathi was shivering with intense anger, Sam couldn't even utter a word, and he knew he had crossed the line...

Sam was born into a family of three, one girl and two boys. They were a closely knit traditional family. Tradition was the silk that wove them into a fabric of times, uniting their past, present, and future years. In all this, their father was the custodian of the family, and their mother had embraced the family traditions and cherished them as an honourable daughter-in-law. The brewing of traditional beer and burning of sage, especially after an achievement in the family, was a well-known norm. Years had passed by, and Sam and his siblings left home to work and start their own families.

Eight years later, Sam had been called home by his parents to discuss a sensitive issue. His brother Joel had been married for six years and had no children while he had been married for a year and his wife was already expecting. Sam was asked to do what he thought was 'the impossible'. His brother was the greatest blessing to him, and hence his responsibility for him was of the same measure. So it did not come as a surprise that he would move mountains for his brothers' happiness. His loyalty to his family and tradition were other pushing factors that compelled him to comply with what his parents asked of him.

Joel was the quiet one, an introvert, a genius, and their father's favourite. He was a successful pharmacist who owned a pharmacy and had opened branches across the country. Sam was the outspoken one, never took things seriously, an average student, and mommy's boy. They were

the sweetest of brothers, each creating sparks of joy in the other. They would do everything together, and that was how that fraternal bond was forged, and that was how it grew stronger each passing day. Whatever came, they were there for each other. That reliability and trust were what built and sustained them. Their family had their struggles as any other, but at the end of the day, they found common ground.

He remembered vividly a year later, after doing 'the impossible', the smile on Joel's face at the birth of his son, Siphon. The boy had brought warmth into the family. Years later, Sam had sired two girls with his wife, and Joel had one boy and a girl. The patriarch of the family passed on, and Joel was given the task of taking care of their mother and the farm since he was the eldest. MaNyathi managed to keep the family intact. Their children grew up to be close to each other, something which they learnt from their parents.

It was when Siphon got a scholarship to go and study Chemical Engineering abroad that all hell broke loose. Sam had brought the news home, and it was not well received. His wife scorned him for being treated like a doormat by his family. She went on and on about how Joel was treated as their parent's model child, how he took over the family farm, how Sam was a nonentity, less successful compared to his brother even though they shared the farm proceeds equally. Joel's children were also doing well compared to theirs, all because Sam concentrated on his brother and mother and

not his own family. Family meant a lot to Sam; he knew his wife was a troublemaker but he had managed to keep that in check over the years. Yet what she said might be true, he thought. After all, Siphos was his biological son, why were all the good things happening to Joel and his family? Enough! The truth had to come out. Yes, he couldn't match his brother's wealth, but at least he could father children. The venom that his wife spewed blinded him such that he did not think deeply about the gravity of what he wanted to do.

'I will not allow you to destroy the unity in this family, the love between you and your brother, between your children,' MaNyathi said with a quivering voice at the same time fighting tears. 'You had to do what we asked for to help your brother, to make him a man amongst other men, and there is no price tag for that, my son, you are a hero, if not for your brother, then do it for me my boy', she pleaded, tears now streaming freely down her cheeks. Sam was heartbroken to see his mother's wrinkled face drenched in tears. Secrets had a way of coming out but let it not be him who would blurt out the truth. It was better to let sleeping dogs lie. Let them fight over other petty things. All that he wanted for this family was peace, to live in harmony. 'It's alright Mom', he said, fighting back tears.

2ND PLACE

Rough edges of success

Olwethu Nyathi

I fill the coffee in the big teapot and waltz to the boardroom. I hear chatter as I approach, I open the door, and my eyes first meet Mr Mthembu, the boss. He frowns at me, annoyed. I close the door and place the coffee on the floor. I knock, and I hear him saying I should come in. I pick up the coffee and enter the room; I place it on the table and pour for everyone in the room. Others were kind enough to show gratitude. I leave and go back to the kitchen. I'm the kitchen girl here. Everything relating to the kitchen is done by me; it gets too much sometimes, with all the abuse I receive here, but I have no choice. When you are not educated like me and you have a family to feed, you have no choice but to grab any job that you find.

I am married, with two beautiful girls. My husband is currently unemployed, but he is so supportive. He helps around the house. I always come home to a cooked meal; he doesn't wait around for me.

I work like a dog every day. I don't find peace here, because these men see me as an object that they can pass around. Being a tea girl was never my dream, I wanted to be a boss

lady, have my own money. But life didn't go according to my plans.

I wipe the tables and prepare for my lunch break, where I will finally sit down. Other ladies dressed smartly in expensive pants and heels come through the kitchen carrying their lunchboxes; their expensive colognes fill the room, and I find myself inhaling their scents. They have made it in life, they scream rich. Even their laugh is fancy, not us who just open our mouths wide and laugh like we are swallowing the sun.

I can already see myself wearing an expensive blouse like this.

"What is this dirty girl doing?" I hear one of them ask, annoyed. I look up and realise that I was holding one of them on their shirt. I remove my hands and look down, embarrassed.

"Do you know how expensive this shirt was!? It costs your yearly salary. Stick to making tea and stop touching people, okay!?" She snaps at me. I nod vigorously, not wanting to get in trouble. Before I have my lunch, I have to warm Mr Mthembu's food and bring it to him. The things I have to endure here! I gallop to his office with his food, I knock, and he gives me permission to enter. I place the food on his desk, shaking. This man is intimidating. I always hold my breath near him.

He takes his food and nods, I stand by. He looks up. “Did you need anything else?” he enquires.

“I was just wondering, Sir. Last month I pitched an idea to you and you said you would get back to me, but you didn’t. Then I heard that you scored a deal with another company, using my idea.” I said, playing with my fingers. Last month, I came to Mr Mthembu with the idea to open a small restaurant outside the building, since most people work late and others don’t bring lunch to work. So they would have food at their disposal, he said he would get back to me, but he never did. I heard rumours that he bagged a deal with my idea.

He looks at me up and down and starts smirking devilishly.

“What makes you think you deserve anything good? You are a woman, and women belong in the kitchen, not in the business world. You should be happy; I took your idea and turned it into reality.”

“But it was my idea; you didn’t give me credit. I came to you with the hope that you would be fair, and I would finally get a more stable job” I complain with my tears already falling. I honestly had hope that it would change my family’s situation.

“Oh dear Felicia, the world isn’t black and white, sweetheart.

You should be grateful that you even have a job. We wouldn't want you to be jobless, now would we?" he asks, raising his eyebrow at me. I feel so oppressed right now. Is it because I'm a woman? Is that why he's doing this to me? Life is not fair.

Weeks later, I was still doing my job and not bothering anyone. My soul was troubled by what Mr Mthembu was doing, but I had a plan. Today they were launching the restaurant. All well-known businessmen are here to bear witness. The event has already started. Mr Mthembu was grinning like an idiot, taking credit for my idea. I sneaked into the front while the MC was speaking and snatched the mic from him. People looked at me and gasped, probably wondering what this dirty girl was doing. I cleared my throat and told them everything, that I was the one who came up with this idea, I told them that Mr Mthembu has been mistreating all the female workers here for years. I was just taking my chances here, but at least they would know the kind of man they work with. I gave the mic back to the MC and ran out.

Hours later, I was called to the boardroom. Mr Mthembu was also there, with the other investors. They asked me if what I said was true, and I confirmed that it was true, Mthembu also agreed, ashamed.

The day ended well, because they gave me the position to lead the restaurant. I wanted to scream and jump, but I had

to control myself. This was finally the breakthrough I had always prayed for. My family will be happy. I am a victim of inequality, and I'm proud to say I came out victorious.

3RD PLACE

Awakening call

Nosipho Gule

In the forever green forest, the winds are blowing softly, and water flows down the valley accompanied by this beautiful sunrise. People are up already as the new king is about to be crowned deep down in rural KwaNongoma. Everything is in place; the royal maidens are running like headless chickens putting the final touch to perfection. It is the coronation of their new king after all.

Sun rays hit my skin, and as I tried to wake up, my head was pounding. I had a lot to drink last night, and my eyes are blocked by the sun as I try to open them. I woke up and did my morning routine. I was avoiding my family because I did not want to be crowned king, and what I did last night made matters worse. I liked living my life in Gauteng, the soft life, by the way, I'm Mholi Nkosiyo Zulu, 30 years of age, the first son of the late Velabahleke Zulu, whose death took a toll on me. I have three siblings, and I have a degree in Business Administration. Well, join me on this bumpy road of understanding leadership and being a leader.

INSIGHT INTO WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANT TO THE LATEVULABAHLEKE ZULU

The late king was very intelligent. His words were of wisdom, a very humble man and a true believer in both God and the ancestors. There is a museum that was built by the king, and it gave a lot of citizens jobs. He gave shares to the families that were poor and powerless. He listened to his people, used his charismatic self for people to listen to him, and follow whatever he said. He instructed people to build riverbanks so that if ever there were floods, nothing would be destroyed. That is what leadership meant to the late king.

CHAPTER I

Mholi's point of view

Maidens started singing, males dancing, poets reciting poems, and others were blowing whistles, a great combination to welcome the soon-to-be king, indeed, it was a great start. As I walked in, everybody bowed down in acknowledgement of the king's entering.

Before the ceremony started, there was a meeting by the elders to enlighten me more on leadership.

RECAP

Ndabezitha

Zulu kamalandela

*Ngokulandela inkomo zamadoda Zulu omyama ondlela
zimhlophe Wena phunga noMageba*

Those were my clan names recited in respect of the king. After that, the meeting proceeded.

Elder 1: Son, we called this meeting so we can enlighten you on this journey you are about to embark on.

Elder 2: Leadership is taking responsibility, it is being accountable, it is taking risks, it is not easy, but leaders are not made, they are born, and you were born for this, we just had to push you to do it.

END RECAP

You see, I got an insight into what leadership and being a leader meant. I was just not ready, I suppose. The coronation was done, and I was the new king of KwaNongoma, but it didn't feel good like it was supposed to.

Months later—narrated

People were dying, the rivers were dry, cattle were destroyed, maidens and palace guards lost their jobs, and the forest was no longer attractive. Mholi sold the land of his great grandfathers and he escaped, leaving the people to suffer. People were treated like slaves. Being a leader requires someone to sacrifice their happiness, but in the long run, they shall find happiness in what they do. Mholi was a selfish and incompetent leader.

Mholi's point of view

(Dreaming) Father, no, please don't do this, don't kill me, father. I woke up drenched in my own sweat. I have been having dreams about my father since I turned my back on the land of my ancestors. I am running out of funds; all the money I gained from selling the land is almost finished. I went to buy bread on my way back to my apartment and was focused on my phone, boom! I got hit by a car, and I don't feel my legs. People were taking pictures instead of calling an ambulance. Finally, I got help, but I still couldn't feel my legs. The doctor said I was okay, but my legs were not functioning at all. That is a game changer. How am I expected to live my life. Life has been rough; I've decided to go back home and fix my wrongs.

KwaNongoma—narrated

Gasps and shock are visible on the people's faces as the king arrives in a wheelchair; he came in a taxi like a commoner. It is now the time when the king must take responsibility and claim the land back for its owners. Mholi was now determined to do whatever it takes to fight for the people of KwaNongoma. Mholi took a big risk and he borrowed money from the bank and bought back the land of his forefather. Thereafter, he went to appease his ancestors, asking for forgiveness; the last step was to address his people.

Mholi's speech

Mazulu Amahle, Sizwe Sambunga noMageba, words cannot describe how sorry I am. I am sorry, I'm willing to do anything to rectify my wrongs. I failed to be a good leader, and my people suffered in the process. It took almost losing my life for me to see I was wrong. The state the land is in saddens me; people died because of my selfishness. I won't bring back lives, but I'll try to improve the lives of the ones alive. I now understand leadership. Leadership is the capacity to have power over your followers, creating a clear vision for people to follow, establishing achievable goals, and providing knowledge on how to achieve those goals. I wasn't all that, but I am willing to change and make this land better than it was.

LESSON TAKEN

LEADERS DO MAKE MISTAKES, BUT THEY HAVE TO OWN UP TO THEIR MISTAKES AND RECTIFY THEIR WRONGS. BEING A RISK TAKER, THAT'S TRUE LEADERSHIP AND HOW A LEADER SHOULD BEHAVE.