



Remembering Nkunzi: An activist, a healer, a husband and a parent

29 May 2018

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde was born on 7 December 1975, in politically active and vibrant Soweto. This healer, activist, and trailblazer stands within a long lineage of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) activists who have shaped and challenged South African discourse around issues pertaining to the often-fatal forms of violence this community is subjected to. Here rests a life which defiantly rejected erasure, and audaciously demanded contemplation and unabridged memorialisation. Through Nkunzi's life, we have not only been immeasurably gifted with the opportunity to journey with him, we are able to see a reflection of ourselves in our fullest form; in unapologetic spirituality, love, healing, resistance, overcoming, and becoming. Nkunzi shared his intimate pursuit of courage with many of us, at each point, compelling us to live beyond life's edges and to be able to intricately weave the varied parts of our existence into a multi-coloured and textured portrait.

On Nkunzi's courage, Sibusiso Kheswa recalls how "courageously, as *isangoma*, Nkunzi, opened up about his sexuality" in ways which laid bare the pervasive belief that "we cannot be African and Queer". Nkunzi's life brought into glaring light that being African is many things, and that indeed "The Ancestors Don't Mind". In the height of hate crimes against black lesbians, Kheswa is reminded of how Nkunzi "openly walked the streets of our townships", and daringly took hold of his and many others' right to constitutional dignity, protection, and justice. As one who lived in and understood the heartbeat of the township alongside the violence enforced on the lives of lesbian women, Nkunzi envisioned and selflessly worked towards a South Africa where "gay people and everyone together [...] with one voice, can shout "No more! No more!".

Since the formation of Iranti, Nkunzi was one of our biggest supporters, he generously believed that a significant space like Constitution Hill belongs to all and that included the LGBTI Queer community. He believed that this site of consciousness is a site that should evoke the reality of what The Constitution stands for. In his time, we were able to launch the first Africa Trans* Day of Visibility. It brought him so much joy to see Trans people from across the region celebrate their gender identity and freely expressing their identities in a manner that mattered. Nkunzi was part of creating a space for Trans* Day of Remembrance, International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, the Johannesburg Peoples Pride, and Mzansi Pride. He was a true ambassador for Constitution Hill and a comrade we could always call upon for assistance and support.

Apart from remembering and celebrating Nkunzi as an activist and healer, the book *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*, published in 2008 with Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA), was crucial in that it shifted and challenged long held understandings of tradition, culture, sexuality, desire, and custom. This text revealed the importance of safeguarding of the memory, life histories, and narratives of the LGBTI community and is a defiant challenge to erasure and silencing. In addition to this, this text offers a narrative of the LGBTI community which is not limited to experiences of violence and being violated. Zanele Muholi holds the strong belief that this piece of work will make sure "no one will be able to remove you from South African historical books". Muholi add that this is a reflection of the importance of "visual histories and visual activism" which provides "new knowledge" and reflects the courageous spirit Nkunzi shared with many. This work; a weaving of life, love, spirituality, and healing provides a necessary re-imagining of the life and journeying of the LGBTI community in South Africa through one of its pioneering activists.

The loss of Nkunzi compels us to call into question why are our lives are shortened by poor health systems and inadequate assistance on Trans* health. At this time, we are reminded of the passing of Malume from Rock of Hope, Swaziland; Maseko from TIA; Charl Marais from GDX and so many other Trans men who left us too soon, having given their young lives to the fight for social justice. In return they received very little assistance and support that could possibly enable them to have been with us longer. In this space of survival and existence, we are honoured to have known and lived in the life and time of Nkunzi.

We salute you, *Hamba Kahle* comrade, rest in power!

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