

Women Reed Dance: My Journey in Regimency
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Umhlanga weLutsango LwaboMake BakaNgwane: My journey in Regimency
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Former President Kenneth Kaunda ‘The high valuation of ‘MAN’ and respect for human dignity, which is a legacy of our tradition should not be lost in the new Africa. However “modern” and “advanced” in a Western sense this young nation of Zambia may become, we are fiercely determined that this humanism will not be obscured; as African society has always been man-centered.’

The Art of Insignificance

Participating in Umhlanga weLutsango was an invaluable learning experience as a writer and researcher; and a tremendous opportunity for mastering the art of insignificance, kuba Umbutfo to be part of Libutfo. This journey began from Ludzidzini Royal Residence, to KaGcina; walking in a straight line, a fundamental part of insignificance. I am athletic, therefore walking at the same pace with others was challenging; moreover watching the steps of the person in front and behind reflects the journey of life.

Carrying my bag on my back was an additional challenge; but I thought reclaiming my bags from trucks would be a daunting experience. The walk was fun and rhythmic, as songs were an important part of this journey; these songs ranged from religious, traditional and contemporary culture, I recall one warning us on how in communities there are many ‘Scare faces’ (serial rapist). This walk also provides an opportunity for BoMake to be expressive and without necessarily fighting; as this moment is about being expressive and not aggressive.

Phezu KoMkono in Action

I spread my Lihya on the grass, my bag was the pillow with two blankets and the tents were warm; women were talking, signing, dancing and praying. Religion is an important part of Umhlanga waBoMake, and this was symbolic of how Christianity and culture is blended and integrated. Hence it would be gross misjudgment to believe that Umhlanga is attended by non-believers; the testimonials from BoMake were affirming the significance of integrating culture and religion.

In the morning to my pleasant surprise an offer of a hot cup of tea, served in an enamel cup. This is uMkono (arm) in action as LoMake brought her handy-gas stove and cups, to sell tea before the official tea was served. It was a delight to drink hot tea with my vitamins at 5.30am; therefore was happy to pay for morning cup of tea in my humble bed. LoMake deserved every penny she made, for her enterprising spirit and not being idle during this period; testimony of uMkono in action, utilizing arms to actively participate in poverty problem solving.

There were numerous income generation activities as BoMake utilized this opportunity to market products they consciously prepared before they left home; such as grass rope of tying the Umhlanga. It was enriching to observe the level of commitment and focus on solving issues of livelihood of their families whilst affirming their cultural identity. This proved to me that BoMake are solution driven as opposed to being ideas driven in addressing livelihood. Their pre-occupation is solving poverty challenges in a practical and proactive manner; and these are the leaders that communities, particularly as poverty experts have been unable to curb poverty.

Regimency Leadership

Whilst in my tent, had discussions with young BoMake who due to early marriage or pregnancy were unable to participate in the Maidens Reeds Regimency; but were eager to affirm their cultural identity, and being Lutsango regiments affords them the opportunity. This conversation made me realize that Lutsango LaBoMake has an incredible role to play in nurturing and grooming young BoMake; the future community and national leadership.

Lutsango LaBoMake is one of the forums of organized leadership that brings together BoMake from rural and urban areas of this country; the purpose being Phezu KoMkono, active participation in poverty problem solving and leadership. This organization creates an opportunity to groom and ground leaders who are solution based as opposed to ideas driven; a classical example was the leadership of the late MP Lomasontfo, as her pre-occupation in Parliament was practical solutions to improve the quality of life of her constituency.

The current parliament has six women who are direct representatives of constituency out of the fifty five national constituencies; and this is unacceptable, when organizations exist at grass root levels where women are visible and active. When asking members of the Regimency why they do not vote for each other, the answer was simply that BoMake vote for men as they lack confidence and support for each other; leading to the responsibility of electing and appointing women being abdicated to the House of Assembly and His Majesty's list.

Today I implore His Majesty King Mswati III to consider members of Lutsango LwaboMake from grassroots to national executive leadership in his list; as they have active participation poverty problem solving leadership track record, which the nation requires to improve the quality of life of its citizens. We watched the documentary on Liphupho LeNdlovukati, on creating agricultural business opportunities and markets for BoMake; and if this initiative is successful, it could transform the quality of life of numerous communities.

Dignity knowledge holders

This journey in Regimency presented insights on dignity vs. prestige, which an on going battle for all African societies; as human dignity continues to be eroded and eradicated by prestige. When we walked to the sidzidzi (swap) at Gcina to cut the Reeds, a brief but dignified walk towards reaffirming and reclaiming our feminine power; as the cutting of the Reeds is symbolic of our role in societies of maintaining dignity as moral and values shields.

Cutting the Reeds reaffirms our national responsibility and fundamental role as protectors and shields of communities with feminine power; which is non physical but emotional and spiritual intercession for our children. uMkono our protection tool from gathering food and firewood to disciplining our children and ensuring that each year the nation celebrates the Timbali Girls Reed Dance and Tingatja Boys Regiments who affirm chastity. After all regiments had finished cutting their Reeds our national leader of Lutsango Make Dlamini prayed and thank God; affirming the integration of culture and religion.

Later that evening a sermon by Reverend Make Mavimbela of the Anglican Church, which reminded BoMake on the role of Mother Maria in giving birth to Jesus Christ; who subsequently transformed and empowered Christians globally, and there was a DJ playing gospel music for BoMake to dance to their hearts content. The evening's program also had presentations on possible projects such as the Queen Mother's dream, Sitini saMake and testimonial on practical issues and challenges when dealing with OVC's in communities.

BoMake are indigenous knowledge holders and custodians of morals and values in communities; hence their interventions always focus on ensuring dignity, this responsibility requires their disciplined lifestyles and inculcating discipline in all children. This dignity has nothing to do with bank balances, the latest fashion and cars; it is about Kubutseka, our emotional intelligence our enabler in living a people centered life, I AM BECAUSE WE ARE (umuntfu ngumuntfu ngebantfu).

Therefore requiring BoMake to rise above material possessions and unite in purpose of solving eminent community issues and challenges; such as poverty at income, social and moral levels, which has created structural and emotional violence in the country. Dignity affords us the opportunity to commune with common purpose; the educated and uneducated as HIV/Aids is challenging our moral poverty irrespective of our status. Active participation with BoMake creates opportunity to engage ideas and practical solutions; which this country requires as opposed to the 'us and them' mentality which is fragmenting our country.

Prestige the detractor

In my view the 'us and them' attitude is polarizing our communities and the nation as ideas are not conversing with practical solutions at the grassroots levels. BoMake are rich with practical solution on how to transform their communities but prestige dis-empowers them from utilizing their powerful voice in contributing to problem solving. Some of BoMake admitted that their have a tendency to accept ideas of the women who promise them wealth for they arrive in communities with huge cars and high heels.

When reflecting on this article, I have painfully avoided using the word 'women' as BoMake shared with me how they are fatigued of 'women women' projects. Primarily due to having lost their savings to numerous 'women women' initiatives; which promised wealth and resulted in loss of hard earned savings. I asked BoMake why they give their power to personalities that promise them prestige, when they have proven to the nation beyond reasonable doubt that they have inculcated the culture of saving.

BoMake's Food Savings Schemes have provided practical poverty solutions in communities and they are testimonies on how saving money is part of Swazi culture; which has had huge impact in curbing poverty, particularly when food competes with education. The culture of saving is a dominate culture in communities, and this can be enhanced towards savings for mid-term projects; as cohesive and functional cooperatives have been formed that could participate in wealth creation initiative and investment projects.

Part of the sentiments towards 'women women' initiative according to BoMake was on how they do not utilize existing community social capital; but it extracts the saving with a promise of prestige, and yet the owners of these saving already have dignity and do not necessarily require prestige. This notion of prestige has been over commercialized and yet its focus is primarily shallow and superficial; BoMake do not desire to be shallow and superficial as their livelihood does not allow them to mask issues and challenges.

Affirming my Cultural Identity

It was my first time to actively participate and immerse myself with BoPhezu KoMkono; to understand the existing social capital for solutions towards social, moral and income poverty.

This is partly because Lutsango LakaNgwane has been predominately branded as for the married, uneducated and poor; hence when I arrived at registration Make Ndwandwe oriented me on this organization enables all women to participate and I feel affirmed in my cultural identity.

I also affirmed my own philosophical outlook, as in 2003 I left the prestige of power dressing and pre-occupation with lifestyle issues; to pursue a career that is highly risky for it promises dignity as opposed to immediate sense gratification. Therefore I could identify with BoMake, who are inspired to focus on income generation from dignity consciousness; as opposed to prestigious sense gratification, hence as Lutsango I shield and protect through writing and share my feminine power with readers.

As a motivator and public speaker BoMake this journey affirmed my own teachings on African Relational Humanism: I AM BECAUSE WE ARE; which is based on the core principles of 'Akusiko Kwami Kwebantfu'. When actively participating as regiment with BoMake, I validated my own teachings of Kubutseka as emotional intelligence; hence a memorable growth point emotionally and spiritually, most significantly I enjoyed the humility and being insignificant throughout the BoMake pilgrimage.

In conclusion as a scholar of African Humanism at a personal and leadership level, this journey had a tremendous impact on how I view the teachings of MA'AT the Egyptian Goodness of Truth, Justice and Order. I danced to my hearts content I am born of the Ndwandwe Royal Dynasty with legacies on dignity embodied in my DNA. Finally and most significantly, I danced to my hearts content, in honour of my spiritual guide the late Queen Regent LaZidze, who guides me to the indigenous knowledge systems embedded in ancient traditions and culture.