

5

INTERVIEW WITH MZILIKAZI WA AFRIKA

This book is more than an undertaking pertaining to reflections on the realities and future of coalition governments in South Africa. It is also, in many ways, a conversation-starter about the need for re-imagining democracy and therefore, centring important institutions in the process. The media is without doubt one of the most important institutions that form the foundation on which strong democracies are built. It is an agency of socialisation that shapes and influences the thinking of society. For this reason, it is only fitting that a chapter in this book be dedicated to a frank discussion between myself and a journalist who has never shied away from asking uncomfortable questions and above all, speaking truth to power.

Leonard Mzilikazi Ndzukula, known to many as Mzilikazi Wa Afrika, is a seasoned investigative journalist who has worked for various national newspapers including the *Sunday Times* and the *Sunday Independent*. In 2010, when national discourse was centred around the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal and Protection of Information Bill, which drew a lot of condemnation from opposition parties and civil society alike, Wa Afrika was arrested in what was believed to have been politically motivated harassment after he exposed the controversial R500 million property rental deal (Wa Afrika & Hofstatter, 2010). In the explosive article, Wa Afrika had stated that the deal never went out to tender, violating National Treasury regulations that all contracts over R500 000 must go through a competitive bid process. He would go on to expose many other troubling issues in government.

To have Wa Afrika as part of the conversation on the present and future realities of coalition governments in South Africa is not an accident of history, but a deliberate effort at communicating that the work of the media is a fundamental cornerstone of a healthy democracy and a transparent government, and that any government that fashions a higher civilisation must not be afraid of accounting to the media on matters of public interest – no matter how uncomfortable these may be. In ensuring that this book communicates the salient message that it seeks to about coalition government, but that journalistic freedoms are also protected, Wa Afrika was given *carte blanche* to ask the questions he wanted to ask relating to the subject, as well as some aspects of the political realities of the ANC.

I am genuinely surprised, Executive Mayor, that you chose a journalist who is not popular in some circles of the African National Congress, to do this interview with

A story is told of an ANC member who went to Tanzania following the 1976 student uprisings in South Africa. Upon his arrival there, he sat down with a senior ANC leader and raised his concerns about the growing Black Consciousness Movement that was attracting scores of young Black people, many of whom were rejecting the ANC and other national liberation movements, arguing that these had become redundant after being forced underground. The ANC member, frustrated at what he perceived as militant, anti-ANC youth, asked the senior leader what needed to be done about these young people who, left to their own devices, would displace the ANC in the imagination of the people. After contemplating the question for a few minutes, the senior ANC leader responded: "What needs to be done is that these young people should be brought into the ANC".

Are you saying you are recruiting me into the ANC?

I am saying the ANC has never been afraid of people who hold different opinions – it is what makes it such a strong organisation. Your dissenting views do not negate the fact that you have a reputation as someone who asks the important questions, and this is more important to any intellectual project than personal feelings about a person.

Besides, the ANC is a home for all South Africans – you included.

Like many South Africans, I am extremely interested in understanding what led to the writing of this book

An American astronomer and author, Carl Edward Sagan, reflecting on the necessity to preserve and support libraries, said: "The health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries". This profound argument has always shaped my relationship with the ideational space and is at the heart of why I wanted this book to be written.

The 2016 local government election was a particularly important political moment in the life of our country. It shaped the political milieu in a way that little else has done before or since and forced all of us as political activists and government practitioners to re-imagine the world in which we exist. The emergence of coalition governments in the metros forced us to think about a future in which the ANC is not hegemonic,