

Nyameka Goniwe (d. 29 August 2020)

On Saturday, 29 August 2020, death struck a painful wound and a fatal blow that sent cold shivers down the spines of the Goniwe family, Lingelihle Community, the Karoo and Province of the Eastern Cape. The sad news of the passing on of Nyameka Goniwe, fondly known as Nyami, sent shockwaves reverberating through the length and breadth of our beloved country. It is a heart-breaking episode particularly to those who had the rare opportunity of working alongside this human colossal and remarkable revolutionary born in struggle, baptised in revolutionary fires and died in the crucible of struggle.

It is indeed serendipitous that the long-suffering heart ended the beat and virtuous mind ceased to think on a month that hitherto occupies a prominent place in our National Calendar, Women's Month. The dark cloud submerging the Lingelihle community and sorrow that has befallen hers and Matthew's children Nobuzwe and Nyaniso is a tapestry reminiscent of our shameful past and constant reminder of a plethora of unresolved contemporary issues including gender-based-violence (GBV) and rampant corruption ubiquitous in both public and private sectors.

The untold violence attacks some sections of society have unleashed on women and children, recent looting by some of our leaders of the 5 billion emergency funds allocated by government to procure Physical Protection Equipment (PPEs) to save lives in the face of COVID-19 onslaught, and digging of 1.5 million graves instead of building, shelter, providing food, blankets and supplements to the needy, must have left Sis Nyami with despair and sense of emptiness. Such conduct and dubious means of survival are antithetical to her moral principles and at variance with the ethos and values on whose basis the founding of the African National Congress (ANC), United Democratic Front (UDF) and Cradock Residents Association (CRADORA) is predicated.

Many, among us would not resist the temptation to eulogise her as the widow of our martyr, Matthew Goniwe. Granted she may have lived in Matthew's shadow for political and cultural reason. However to those of us who met her during the turbulent 1980s and to the youth and women who met her after the assassination of Matthew Goniwe, Sicelo

Mhlawuli, Sparrow Mkhonto and Fort Calata we all were inspired by her quiet but strategic leadership, courageous and indomitable spirit. She understood the principle of women emancipation to the point of being a radical afro- feminist, she was with us in battle trenches as the young lions and death defiant township residents. Forging alliances to sustain Organs of Peoples Power and served a midwifery role in interplay between these organs of Peoples Power and the ANC's clarion call to all South Africans to render the apartheid system unworkable and the country ungovernable.

Sisi Nyami was at the centre of the ideological debates with respect to the interpretation of our National Democratic Revolution and its immediate strategic tasks. We observed her with keen interest straddling the tight rope in the inescapable discourse of civic formations, militant student, youth movements and trade unions ever-advancing insurrectionary campaigns to crush the apartheid junta between the hammer of mass uprising and the anvil of armed struggle, on the one hand. The white left advocacy for all-round isolation of South Africa by the international community, support of popular demands such as the release of political prisoners, return of exiles and a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement, on the other. Germane to the challenges of the time was the violence visited upon townships by then South African Police killing machinery, the South African Defence Force and its surrogates and mercenaries. Therein lied the role of the Sisi Nyami we know who understood the dialectic of how one pillar of struggle re-enforces the other and did not seek to counter-pose one form of struggle over another.

To the extent that the struggle and unity of the progressive forces had to be premised and mobilised on a non-racial principles in her book and women had to be at the fore-front of those epic struggles. This is a posture she adopted out of lived experience that apartheid maimed its opponents whether black or white, young and old, man and women with callousness and with equal brutality. This she knows from her own life experience, from the testimonies of her compatriots like Molly Blackburn, Di Bishop, Judy Chalmers and others. She knows this as a fact from the cries of Parents of Sipiwe Mthimkhulu, Topsy Madaka, from the forsaken children of Nokhaya Menzi, Qaqawuli Godolozzi, Siphon Hashe and Champion Galela. The sorrow in the face of widows and widowers of political activists invoked a pledge for her never to dishonour the plight of down trodden masses and the cause of Freedom.

She indeed laid a solid platform for paralegal training of young people and women to know theirs and community rights and defend themselves against a regime whose activities were predicated on a system that was declared as a crime against humanity. We were among hundreds of young people and women selected from the Karoo in the main, for intense legal training and basic procedures for establishing a community advice office. These workshops were sponsored by the Legal Education Action Project and Blacks Sash. The Workshops and training sessions were convened by the energetic Sis Nyami and were held in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and some dorpias in Southern Cape. This effort laid the basis of an alternative legal system by building a cadre ship working for justice. Hence Sis Nyami threw her weight behind the drive to establish offices in most towns in the Karoo and mobilised resources for their optimal functioning development of a revolutionary intelligentsia. Soon after the advent of democracy advices lost their lustre and the wheels came off as the cadres deployed in the advice office and resource centres scampered for lucrative government jobs and business opportunities. The onset of some of the current challenges, the social faultlines reared

their ugly head and this is the turning point in the road we traversed to democracy. The rest is history!

We were warned by our own Bishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu as the stubborn Israelites were warned through the prophet Ezekiel in Chapter 7 entitled: THE END IS HERE

Wherever you look –
East, west, north, or south-
Your land is finished
No hope remains,
For I will unleash my anger against you,
I will turn my eyes away and show no pity
I will pay you for all your detestable sin,
Then you will know I am the Lord!
This is what the Sovereign Lord says
Disaster after disaster is coming is coming your way
The end has come
It has finally arrived Your final doom is waiting

We refuse to be prophets of doom but choose to be change agents that bring light and hope to the people of South Africa. Because this is the best epitaph to our departed heroine, not to lose hope and despair but pick the fallen spear and continue the struggle for radical economic transformation, we will rekindle the impulses towards a transparent, accountable and participatory democracy form of governance in our life time.

Inspired by the release of Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela from prison, the famous Irish poet Shemus Heaney wrote:

History says don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme."

Hamba Kahle Mkhonto! Mbokodo! The Sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement!

Max Fuzani

(Max Fuzani a social entrepreneur from Cookhouse in the Eastern Cape and now lives in Pretoria, Gauteng. He worked with Nyami Goniwe in the 80s).