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TRIBUTE TO SONWABO PAPER NGXALE

Last Saturday the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) reburied one of its foremost unsung heroes, Sonwabo Paper Ngxale, who was brutally murdered during the bloody feud between UDF and AZAPO in the mid-1980s in Gqeberha.



Ngxale, who was abducted by UDF members and murdered on August 3 1986, was only 22 years old when he was killed. He had risen to become the Eastern Cape Provincial Chairperson of AZAPO.

Speaker after speaker spoke fondly of Ngxale who they described as a passionate revolutionary, a Mathematics genius and a soccer maestro.

In his tribute to his close friend and Comrade, AZAPO President Cde Nelvis Qekema said had Ngxale lived, he would have been a scientist as he was highly gifted in Maths. Ngxale was the best Maths student in the Eastern Cape when he passed his matric in 1984. He was invited to an event in Durban where best matric performers of his class were honoured.

Owing to his poor background, he could not raise money to register at university in 1985. When his teacher realised that Ngxale did not go to university, the community was mobilised to raise funds to help him register the following year. At the beginning of 1986, Ngxale took a train to Bloemfontein, heading for Durban with the objective of registering as a BSc student at the University of Zululand. However, the connecting train to Durban delayed by a day. He only arrived in Durban a day later and was told that he could no longer register. He had to go back home where he continued with his political activities in AZAPO.

Ngxale's enduring legacy is that he was a loyal adherent of Bantu Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy. A witness who was present when Ngxale was shot at the back of his head before his body was mutilated said his killers offered to spare his life only if he would denounce Biko as a CIA agent. But

the principled Ngxale told his captors that they can do whatever they wanted to do to him, but he would not betray the revolution and Biko.

Because of the intensity of the feud, Ngxale was not given a proper burial. His funeral service could not be held at his home because it was not safe to do so at the time. In fact, his family members could not attend the funeral which was conducted by AZAPO comrades at their base in Gratten Street in New Brighton. His grave was not marked to ensure that his tormentors would not vandalise it.



Oekema told the packed Great Daku Hall that a "wrong" grave was dug up during the exhumation last Thursday. The "wrong" grave turned out to belong to Cde Fuzile Night Lupuwana, who could not stomach Cde Ngxale's death. He escaped from the AZAPO base and handed himself over to the political rivals to be burned to death.

In a move on healing and restoration, AZAPO led by its President Cde Nelvis Oekema and other Regional leaders such as Winky Mngqibisa approached the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in 2020 to have Ngxale reburied in the Heroes Acre section of the cemetery of Zwide Township in Gqeberha. The request was granted and Ngxale was given a proper and revolutionary send-off he so richly deserved.

At the reburial function on Saturday, the ANC was represented by one of its Regional leaders Thando Lamani while Eastern Cape Provincial Chairperson of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania Sanda Goqwana spoke on behalf of his

organisation.

Lamani offered an apology on behalf of his organisation for the murder of Ngxale. In his address, Oekema said AZAPO accepted the apology plea. He said the function should serve to unite Black people to confront the challenges that kept Black people in poverty and without land.

The UDF-AZAPO feud broke out in Gqeberha and spread to other parts of the country including the townships of Soweto, Johannesburg and Sobantu in Pietermaritzburg. While it was generally accepted that the apartheid State machinery fuelled the so-called Black-on-Black violence, it was triggered by AZAPO's planned disruption of the visit of United States Senator Edward Kennedy's visit to South Africa in 1984. AZAPO, which was the most organised and powerful political formation in the country at that moment, opposed the visit as the organisation advocated for total isolation of the apartheid Zuid Afrika. However, the UDF welcomed the visit, which led to the tension that erupted into violence between supporters of the two organisations.

Many AZAPO members were murdered through the so-called necklace method, whereby a tyre doused with petrol would be put around the victim's neck and set on fire. Siphso Mngomezulu was one of the AZAPO members who were murdered in this cruel fashion. To add insult to the injury, his killers disrupted his funeral and partially burnt the coffin that was carrying the remains of his charred body. It was a sad era of our history when a section of the liberation movement believed that they had a copyright to the liberation struggle in our country.

Even in death, Ngxale communicated a profound message to the broad liberation movement that the enemy is not one another but the system of colonialism, racial oppression and economic exclusion.

We can, and we should, draw lessons from the tragedy of the brutal murder of Ngxale. Unlike

Biko, Ngxale was not murdered by functionaries of the apartheid State. Unlike Tshifhiwa Muofhe, Ngxale was not murdered by the Bantustan security police officers too eager to show their bosses in Pretoria that they did not tolerate “terrorists” to operate in their areas. Unlike Solomon Mahlangu or Benjamin Moloise, or Andrew Zondo, Ngxale was not hanged by the apartheid State for his role in the liberation struggle. Unlike Thabang “Cobra” Motlolisi and Mzwandile Mcoseli, Ngxale was not killed in combat with the apartheid security forces. Ngxale was murdered because of political hegemony rooted on ignorance. He was murdered because of a belief that some in the liberation movement had the exclusive right to fight the racist and colonialist enemy. He was murdered because some believed the nonsensical notion that a section of the liberation movement was the “sole and authentic” representation of the people.

Throughout our history as Black people, Black people have been manipulated to focus on what divides them and fail to focus on what unites us. In the early 1990s, there was a low-intensity war between supporters of the ANC and those of Inkatha Freedom Party in the Reef Townships and in parts of KwaZulu. That conflict, which was also fuelled by apartheid security forces, claimed more than 20 000 lives in less than three years. The liberation armies, the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA), the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA) and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cannot collectively claim 20 000 casualties for all their operations dating back to early 1960s when the older liberation movements launched their military campaigns.

Our continent is littered with countless examples of Afrikans turning guns on each other. In Rwanda, more than 800 000 people, mainly Tutsi minorities, were slaughtered in what had been described as a tribal conflict between the Hutus and Tutsi people in that country. A similar conflict erupted in Burundi where countrymen and

women turned on each other, resulting in the slaughtering of hundreds of thousands of people.



In the early 1990s, Liberia was engulfed in civil war in which different warring factions fought each other resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. In neighbouring Sierra Leone, the situation was worse with rebel groups mutilating arms of civilians in a senseless war.

In Angola, after the retreat of the Portuguese colonialists, the UNITA launched a war on the MPLA-led government. In Mozambique, it was RENAMO versus FRELIMO. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the warring factions are too many to count. The picture is worse in Somalia. Libya has never known peace since the brutal assassination of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Now Sudan is at war. None of the warring factions has capacity to make weapons. These weapons are made available by the outside forces who intend plundering resources in the different parts of Afrika while Afrikans are at each other’s throat.

The conduct of a section of the oppressed to be coopted into the oppressing class and to become the foot soldiers of the exploiting class is entrenched in history. During trans-Atlantic slave trade, it was some Afrikans, including traditional leaders, who worked with slave traders to hunt down other Afrikans and surrender to the

European and American slave traders.

In the era of colonialism, some Afrikan leaders actively worked with the colonisers against their fellow Afrikans. The system was perfected in the neo-colonial era when puppets of imperialism such as Mobutu Sese Seko actively worked against the development of his people and country to advance the interests of the former colonisers.

The common thread in all these conflicts where Afrikans are determined to liquidate one another is the absence of Black Consciousness. BC unlocks the mental chains and helps us know who the real enemy is and empower us to stop murdering one another.



Theme: *Healing & reconciliation beyond the liberation struggle*

3rd JUNE 2023 | 📅 | 📍 DAKU HALL, GQEBERHA

SONWABO “PAPER” NGXALE RE-BURIAL CEREMONY

If there is something that we can do to honour the memory of Ngxale and ensure that his legacy lives forever, it would be to embrace Black Consciousness. When we do that, we will know that we are stronger when we are together. We will know that as Black people, we are each other’s keeper.

