

Do we need a month that celebrates women?

By Laura Sasman



IN SOUTH AFRICA the month of August has been declared Women's Month. Namibia does not have a month dedicated to women.

One may legitimately wonder whether there is a reason why women may need to be commemorated. In the case of South Africa, Women's month pays tribute to the contribution that women from all walks of life and all racial classifications have played in their struggle against *Apartheid*.

It all started when on the 9th August 1956, thousands of women marched to government buildings in Pretoria to protest against pass-laws for women. It is said that this was the day when women became "equal" partners in the struggle towards a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa and the slogan of that defiance campaign reverberated through the corridors of power for years to come.

The aftermath of the Marikana (South Africa) shooting in August in which 34 miners were shot dead, leaves a distinct aftertaste of the Sharpville massacre. However, the Sharpville shooting resulted in local and international outrage and became an iconic milestone for the liberation struggle not only in South Africa, but for Namibia as well.

We recently were confronted with the full-colour, front-page image of Mswati the turd..(I mean, third...) from Swaziland in the media – a man who has come to embody the archaic and backwards so-called traditional social structures in which women are relegated as second – if not third-class beings. On page 5 of the same paper, there is an almost per chance mention of the killing of two women and the disappearance of another in the same week in Oshakati. And then we moved on to the next story. I have not heard or read another word about that story since then.

While our government was hosting – probably at our expense – this 15th richest monarch in the world, not an afterthought was spared about our own citizens who were disposed of at the hands of former lovers during the same week. There was no outcry for Frieda Shikongo (22), Letitia Ndashuilwa Nghilongwa (18) and Basila Shikesho (23.) Like the Marikana shooting, probably because it is an inconvenient topic, we remain mum about the atrocities committed against these women.

This screams of double standards and hypocrisy. The Sharpville massacre in South Africa in 1960 justified global outrage and the militarised demand for liberation. Today – because our own "comrade-brothers" are sitting at the helm of power – the vague promise of an investigation in the case of Marikana seems to be enough to quell similar outrage.

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The violence and atrocities committed by individual white persons against individual black people, rightly, called for the universal condemnation of the *Apartheid* system. However, continued systemic and structural violence against women and sexual minorities, so far failed to evoke a comparable denunciation of patriarchy and criminal chauvinism when committed by our own “brothers.”

We are horrified by the “honour” killing of women in Pakistan which currently are making headlines in international news, however, we allow the rape, so-called “corrective” rape, abuse, atrocities and killing of women and sexual minorities in our own

country to continue practically unnoticed. Why is “honour” killing of a woman in Pakistan globally deplorable when “passion” or “corrective” killings in Namibia are apparently tolerated? What is the essential difference between the two kinds of killing any way? It seems as if it is essentially the fragile egos of men that are at stake in both these “types” of atrocity.

Returning to the question on the need for a month of commemoration of women, I can think of at least two very good reasons why Namibia may need a women’s commemoration month. Firstly it would be to commemorate and remember all the Friedas Letitias and Basilas whose senseless deaths were relegated to the back-pages of our collective consciousness. Secondly, to mourn for the victims of a rabid structural system, patriarchy, in which women are “taught” that it is better to continue life with an abusive and brutal man, because – should you even contemplate to leave him, your life cannot be guaranteed.

Just like the women who marched to the government buildings in Pretoria in 1956 to put an end to systemic racism, we must overcome our inhibitions to be outraged when atrocities are committed by our own people. Anything else would make a travesty of the struggle heralded in by those women whose rallying call “you strike a woman, you strike a rock,” shook the foundations of an oppressive system. This must remain the battle cry against predatory sexism and patriarchy - that – like *Apartheid* – devalues and dehumanises some, in this case us, the women of Namibia. **SN**

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