

Thenjiwe Mthintso chose the memorial service of her lover (partner), Skenjana Roji, to defend their choice to live together and not get married. The South African Communist Party (SACP) and African National Congress (ANC) "forgot" to mention her in a pamphlet in which they paid tribute to Skenjana. The pamphlet about his life read: "He is survived by his mother, father, six sisters and one brother." No mention is made of Thenjiwe, with whom the deceased chose to live with for many years.

We (the women who attended the service) were ashamed of our organisations.

When Thenjiwe walked into the hall where the service was being held, we wanted to protect her. We did not want her to see the pamphlet. But how could she not look at the programme for the memorial service of her lover?

She read the pamphlet and decided to stand up and talk about her relationship with Skenjana. Thenjiwe openly and clearly challenged our society, the SACP, ANC and Cosatu. Why had they ignored her partnership with Skenjana? She told the crowd that people must learn to accept that not everyone agrees with the rules set by society.

Many people will say Thenjiwe should have been more careful about what she said. However, with courage and strength she spoke about how she felt. She chose that hall as the battle field. She said it was her right to be recognised as the woman who was in a partnership with this man.

Had she been silent, it

Bitter-sweet memories

On Friday 1 October 1993, Thenjiwe Mthintso broke the rules of African tradition. She chose the memorial service of her lover (partner) and comrade, Skenjana Roji, to defend the choice they made years ago to live together. Nomboniso Gasa pays tribute to her

would have been a betrayal of Skenjana and the choice they had made together.

As a soldier, she turned the hall into a battle field. As a political educator, she educated us.

We listened with bitter-sweet feelings. We were sad that she had to fight this battle on that sad day.

We were proud and even happy that she had taken it up. We admired her courage. We nodded our heads to show that we agreed with her. We looked at her with pride, sadness and joy. Go on, sister. Go on! Kubo!

As she spoke, our eyes comforted her. With our hearts, we touched her. With our tears we helped her to cry, because we were the women she was talking to.

When Thenjiwe said, "the personal is political", many of us felt a bit guilty. This was something we often forget

about.

She said the struggles we are fighting in our personal lives are important.

For the sake of "peace" in the home, many strong women choose to wash the dishes and ignore the oppression they face in their homes. But, in fact, it is this struggle which is central to our daily lives and struggle as feminists.

Thenjiwe spoke of the need to practice what we preach in our personal lives. At the end of it all, we were left with ourselves and our thoughts. There is a need to balance the political and the personal aspects of our lives; to love and be loved; to appreciate and be appreciated.

She showed a lot of courage when she spoke openly and honestly about Skenjana's shyness. Many of us hide the emotional side of our being. Dealing with the regime, and exile meant that we had to be strong, we did not want to be



Photo: Purnia Radu

Hamba Kahle Skenjana Stewart Roji

Skenjana Stewart Roji was born on 10 November 1952 in King Williams Town. Skenjana became involved in politics while studying at Fort Hare university. In 1975 he was expelled from Fort Hare because of his political involvement. After his detention in 1976, Skenjana went into exile to join the ANC. He worked in the ANC's military structures and, in 1986, re-entered South Africa and began to build underground structures inside the country. For many years, Skenjana avoided arrest. In 1990 he was detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act and was released under the indemnity granted to political prisoners. In 1991 he was elected General Secretary of the SACP in the Border region. He also served on the ANC executive committee of that region. In 1992 he moved to Johannesburg to take up his position as SACP National Political Education Officer. He died on September 28 1993 after a long illness.

He is survived by his partner, Thenjiwe Mthintso; his mother; father; six sisters and a brother.

ANC and SACP leader Thenjiwe Mthintso... people must learn to accept that not everyone agrees with the rules set by society

emotional about things because we did not want to show any signs of weakness.

Our society also decides that men should be strong and not have or show emotions. Women are expected to be soft, gentle and tender. Sometimes women in the struggle for equality have been expected to be as strong as

men in order to be accepted.

The time has come for all of us, women and men, to drop our shields. To be human again — to accept ourselves; to cry, laugh, love and enjoy life. Perhaps we will find that being honest and open with those closest to us will make us more useful and strong in our struggle. Maybe the most powerful struggle is the one that is from

inside all of us.

Thenjiwe said what she believed needed to be said, in the most difficult situation.

This is our tribute to you sister. Thank you for doing it for us, the women and men in that hall. In doing it for yourself you have done it for all of us, with courage, and strength and beauty, so much beauty, you did it. ☪